

Marcel Ray Dorries

Remembrance

The way I remembered

Range: 1

'Small towns are fun places. Everyone thinks they know everyone.

They bought, sold and live in fear of aging and cold. Life to death is just a myth just a wish, just to walk in the dark, to leave your mark, in the life they embark on.

However, they know what it is like, nowhere to run to go, come and go, without anything to show. With some high and some low. However, they always know that narrow minds never change, only to reorganize, in return.

Memories never fade, and those who tell their lies get paid. Everything disappears today. There is always someone who has something to say. Whatever happens, it's just another day... In a small town, with dreams fixed in the ground, with names only on the rocks to find.

When one person manages everything and is crowned, we dance like fools, we are his clowns. It's just life that bows to a small town, it's just words that revolve around it. With such misfortune and grief, this crowned witch was suppressed, not on a broomstick.

Follow behind you like the moon, or be busy making drama in the room.

Sounds like me - what about you?

~ Nadalin ~

(Let's get back to now, and the weekend before the dream study week.)

I dreamed of thinking that there's nothing more pleasant than seeing your girlfriend ride a in front of you just so you can see her giving her personal pleasure see her love do that pleasure. I love Emma!

'The dream mission is over - for the most part.'

Ginger groaned, and for a few moments, she looked at her ceiling.

'And it looks like it's going to rain.'

'What does this have to do with our homework?' said Emmah, raising her eyebrows.

'Nothing,' Ginger said immediately, his ears blushing.

At five to five o'clock, Naddalin said goodbye to the other two and walked to Scott's office on the third floor. When she knocked on the door, she called, 'Come' in a sweet voice. She entered cautiously, looked around. She knew the office under three former occupants.

When Mr. Hilliard lived there, she was pasted with smiling pictures of herself. When Lupin occupied it, you would probably come across a wonderful dark creature in a cage or tank if you came to name it. In the days of the Modi crook, it was filled with many tools and artifacts to reveal movement, entertainment and disguise.

Now, however, it seemed unrecognizable to me and them. All surfaces were covered with blankets and lace fabrics.

There were several vases filled with dried and dead flowers, each resided on a tablecloth in its place, and on one of the walls were a set of ornamental dishes and dishes, each decorated with a large cat colored in all different colors. With ribbons around the neck.

These were so foul that Naddalin stared at her until Professor Scott spoke again.

'Good evening,' Mr. Naddalin began to look around... To the wonder of those around her, she did not notice her at first sight, because she was wearing a set of dresses with frank flowers that pair well with the tablecloth on the desk behind her.

'Good evening, Professor Scott,' Naddalin said sternly.

'Okay, sit down,' she said, pointing to a small lace-wrapped table next to her... A straight back chair is set up. An empty piece of parchment was lying on the table, apparently waiting for her to write.

'Ah,' Naddalin said without moving. Professor Scott. Uh - before I start, I - I wanted to ask you... Service'.

His bulging eyes wrinkle his nose.

Feeling very sad in the castle, Naddalin opened the door.

In the entrance stood Aunt Margaret May. She was - very similar to Uncle Richard Reed: tall, burly and all her face, she had - even blur in places where she did not want fluff, but not as thick as her.

In one hand she was - holding a huge bag, and slipped under the other she was old and temperamental, carrying a monster, turned into this from the fact that he was

mean, mean and pretty much all the little girls in the country - they thought they were not good enough for him, and this was done - by one of the fallen angels - who studied black magic, 20 years ago - so that she did not want her hand, like others who were cute and innocent little girls , or not going to the ball with her, was the real reason, all the girls still laugh at him and at each other.

Dariez arrived walking around the hall, her blonde hair glued flat to her forehead, a barely visible knot on top of her that she forgot to remove before bathing, she was as naked as the day she was born, showing everything that makes her a girl. We all slapped our hands our forehead, saying she was a girl – true, everything was unknown – even though she was before puberty.

Aunt Margaret May pushed the bag into Naddalin's old room dragging that girl's body with her, knowing that she ended up escaping, though, Dariez in a tight one-arm hug, raining from me, and planted a big kiss on my cheek, about 5 minutes after I was in my old room.

Naddalin knew very well that Dariez tolerated these hugs only because she knew how she was reading about the sisters, who did not agree, in her studies, and with Carly, her past, and of course, when they broke up, Dariez had a note in his grasp, saying add this to your story. It was like - 'I want to be one of you...'

... And Jenath!

Then Aunt Margaret May shouted to get off her and get dressed, walking next to Naddalin as if she were the coolest girl she had ever known, like a hero.

Aunt Margaret May and Aunt Ginath hugged us, in our rush to bed, while we were all scattered around the room, Dariez hit her little jaw on my chin, telling you.

Then Uncle Richard Reed walked in, smiling excitedly as he closed the door and said, Children of the Night.

(They've had a good time, I think.)

... And tea for me, Margaret May, they said together in the corner, in soft light, stars from the windows. And she says, how she loved him and all those seemingly romantic things.

~*~

And the kitten may have some milk in my plate, here ...

Aunt Margaret May said afterwards as they were all walking to her - for a midnight snack around 3:00 a.m. in the kitchen, leaving Naddalin alone in the hall with - the bag, she wants to be there, all night - to remember everything that happened.

However, Naddalin did not complain. Any excuse for not being with Aunt Margaret May was fine with her - when she learned that she was cuddling with him, 'yuck - that's it' - she thought, so - she began to go back to the case door under the stairs to her spare bedroom, which took as long as possible, looked at them all but didn't try either.

In her room under the stars... I'm thinking of Emma... I started thinking about all the PDA I got, and I love it – we like to feel happy and please each other. (I love pussy licking.) I roll over, naked in my bed, fumble the sheets, hold them as if they were, mumble - in thought ... Nodal mind.

Her hands slip under her blue dress, under her panties with the bow in front, her body contracting and relaxing and taking her little breasts with her nipples she starts pointing upwards, in her hands and feels the hard beads of her nipples, like little puzzles to play with in her mind

Emma's hand and tongue, on the palms of her hands barking.

She puts her hands under her knees and maneuvers carefully, so that her bottom rests on the edge of the bed. Her fingers glide under the worn elasticity of her panties pulled over the points of her hips and lower lips, she feels the slow twisting of her dying heart and she can see a bluish tint bloom on her skin through her soft dress, her hair plumped back, as she enters. Then she slips into her ankles, gently spreads her knees, and feels a watery enthusiasm again ... In her eyes, she begins to cry ... It's just as he imagined it—the feel of the hair, the texture of the lips, the whole feeling—and she slides her hands under her ass afterward, saying - I miss her, now I feel horrible and need to take a shower, I sweat - o-wh-a, as she watches her handover at her climax.

'I wanted to kiss her in my head forever – albeit in my moment. I withheld any thoughts that weren't about her, what that could mean, what further mess I might make for myself... I knew, and kissed a pillow as if it were even the mind seeping through my pores, and became a living pulse with pulses, only aware of what I wanted to do with it and with it and for myself, if it did... And suddenly we crashed around the small rail car in my mind... And this is where my imagination happened, all hands and lips, and oh my God, its smell, taste and texture. It was like small fireworks exploding on top of me, when I shot, he cut me off... Search for them to find the same path. -I- I appreciate it very much because we are together in the longing of love and finding something new to discover with each other - the mind, the body, and the fallen soul too.

By the time I was back in the kitchen, Aunt Margaret May had swallowed all the tea to take, was very sleepy, and couldn't even speak clearly, with the cat noisily napping in her corner. Naddalin saw Aunt Jinath wink slightly as tea beans and clean soil poured out of her mouth. Aunt Jinath hated animals, like our cat buttons, which is the cutest thing ever.

Uncle Richard Reed asked me why I was on my tiptoes in the kitchen - yet, in a transparent dress - it was so sharp and I don't even know why - I bothered to put it back on - well, that's what he said - anyway - why even bother when you can see everything. 'Hey Jeez, us...' I said hold - like a girl ... In a moment of shame. I didn't expect anyone to be here at this hour.

-And-

The buttons began to snore again when Naddalin sat down, flipping the grades she was pointing to for upcoming lessons — blue in the middle of the night. She first brought Naddalin's attention to Aunt Margaret May, as she was also whizzing, then she became alert, the lantern above her head was dancing with its flashing flame, and it was an old lantern from 1909 Pa. The railroad read by Uncle Richard. Live light to create a feeling and mood, this works - the person in my room is on the room I funded next to the cliffs years ago, walking on the abandoned line in the forest heading north, everything is curved and some glass is missing, but I love it because I knew it was here - the daughter of the story, something that has been passed down through the years. 'Sometimes I don't like coming back here and sometimes I want to remember...'

He watched me blow his pipe, which was so familiar to me in my mind, but I couldn't remember why, and then he said, 'I remember that summer tires were always ... Like this... Nothing really changes.' I started to feel sad and cry... I saw a vision from the past of what seemed like a grandfather, a railroad worker, in the golden cast to replace him, with a glowing halo around him in incandescent lights, saying - 'Don't forget me - too,' he wore his 1920s hat that was always tilted to one side, and that white, very bright smile was strange.

-And-

Even... I thought - what does that mean?

And she had meowed... And he brought me out of the coma, that I was, and still am, parts of you, even now, as I was carrying a note, of him and now too, a part of life that never changes there, just moves into a new life, just like you. So the point of this is still that we're not far apart in the way we act and do things, though... 100 years of eloquence kept us away from me, still all together, bound by handwritten text.

All notes only, but have a lot of meaning, just a memory, for life for some I will not care that's all.

-And-

(The fare in another small village is Emma - the same feeling.)

Emma - 'I am a hopeless romantic', then she thought about this, and she said to me - 'You are no longer desperate, you have me, to show your sweet romance also without despair.'

That's why... I would like... Naddalin a lot.

(Back)

Yes, Naddalin said of course, they have to take care of me all the time, even though I'm gone.

Don't you say 'yes' in such an ungrateful tone?

I can do it... I'll add to the story. I'll do this... I'm fine - do - this!

(For a girl who doesn't know - I'm sure I did something!)

~*~

And it's nice to keep you Reading and Jinath around, I also thought and they know everything I just did, but I'm a girl, I feel very guilty for everything I do - until I feel like a woman - not a little girl as they think, even Darry's needs to feel like a woman once in a while - more like every day, and seeing us again understands my drift.

Why?

Why... Have I always felt guilty for feeling good?

I wouldn't get it any other way - that's what makes me creative.

He told me - 'You would have gone straight to an orphanage if you were thrown on my doorstep, you cute little furry ball of a girl, how can I say no, and he was hugging me. Left cheek?

(Like I said, there were good times.)

-And-

Naddalin was overflowing with cakes and milk, to say that she would rather live here than return to the orphanage where Christine once was, with - Sheyash's was safe

and warm, but - she thought about her - Claepsiara, Skoufyceol of magic for years - she stopped for it - they said 'well-' and this' your girlfriend was so for you to be happy and then well, sorry for what you would think - he said. She forced her face to smile painfully, saying thank you, I think he meant it. It was a pleasant long conversation - in the early hours of the morning.

I thought and assumed - 'I'd be happy to play with her all my life, somehow, why are we the best playmates, right?'

I smiled at myself, in the mirror facing her, I was standing naked! Then Aunt Margaret May looked at me and quickly closed the door, I saw my ass, the look was reflected on my face, in the mirror she could see Emma the same way she looks at her lingering love.

~*~

So a week passed and I was sent back to the old train station where I went back to school... Cut from reality ...

It was a happy time - then the door of my room opened again, one of the girls, with whom I have to share the house - a bit like a sister but not, which will remain nameless - saw me like a light in a cloud of ash dust and a magical wave of evaporation, as it disappeared before his eyes. 'Besides, I see that you haven't improved since the last time I saw you, that's what he told me.' I was hoping that your meat school would give you more morality, than they think, in more ways than one.

I couldn't even say goodbye to aunt and uncle, who were still sipping tea in the kitchen, where I was torn at this time, I could hear a big sip of tea, whispers, more about me and about other girls in the house than me.

Good stuff... More than anything else - and yet it made me sad.

~*~

Also, she was - peeping and blinking - blinking again, again - she said - ... She then returned to the faint flashing light emitting a soft warm glow in the kitchen, where she asked if they would reject Nadalin again. And if so, if she's gone or not yet, and if she has a mockup label in her room, 'Why are you asking me that, child?

I think I've just seen it disappear... If you don't have a picture of her ... No smell.

-And-

Uncle Richard Reed quickly said St. Brutus said 'if she's not here, she's there - baby.'

It is a leading institution for desperate situations.

-And-

I see, said Aunt Margaret May. Are they used in St. Brutus, my daughter, and she held a quail feather in the small hand, and a stick in the other, with a heart-shaped ruby on the side of the costume? She must not have needed it or left it to - Dariez who desperately wants to be like her, tried to break it in her lap right now, it didn't break.

'Go give it to her now...' He said austerely, as he began to glow and change color in the stone, and read his name in the crystal of the stick that was silver.

She thought about it through her wooden desk, to her while she was in her room at home.

'I remember her saying that it is not necessary, but rather cool to show your intelligence, skills, abilities, levels of talent and strength, a story of a little girl like me...' Daris said, his eyes sparkling with astonishment and the possibilities of the phenomenon if his mind could open it with magic, and that girl would start to hurt or become a girl who had also fallen.

-So-so-I-

Dariez, I looked through, her room that I was—me and I, and I found her—I knew she was going to get one, I just knew, a little glass spruer that was big for her little hands—a crystal ball—that would show all my days, and that leads me to find this book in the forbidden parts of the abandoned city library built in 1898... It's next door to collapse... I knew I had to go there in finding the sneak late at night, tonight - look in the glass I saw, the story of a girl, very much like me, showed a very dark past of a young girl's life, like a video - showing hanging and bullying, of a girl who was a copy of me, it seems... However, the question I had was why? He said death is the only way out... Was it me - was it ... I'm the girl in the glass dropping it ... I need to find more... And I felt that this book had a magical power over me which I also had is the copy. He also said that I have everything I need to be a fallen angel if I believe - if I believe in the power of white magic.

Looking at the book of all his days, here's something that seemed to appear right before my eyes, text hidden between lines and lines, on the torn old yellow pages there was a line of derogatory words hidden secrets about his life and his native village. It was pale gray in the style of his beautiful handwritten calligraphy. Around the text there were magic bristles—shimmering with shades of gold—shimmering around and around the letters she said as I read aloud: 'Naffa's birthplace was the longest small town in the

earthly world, she was a guide—for those who needed to know, to know whether they should or believe in her or if someone like her.

-And-

Then I looked again deeper and said girl - I was with white wings ... Flash, ever softly - and angelically

Uncle Richard Reid nodded dryly behind Aunt Margaret May's back, saying, 'Oh no - another.'

As she ran into his room circling around him in circles, saying uncomical worlds... Hoping to do something, or need like lighting his father's shorts, giving him two heads, or getting out of choirs and homework, and figuring out ideas about what magic can do and how dark it can be.

And yes, Naddalin said, on the phone saying to him - 'Shh-sh and again she said - silence, do not become like me - be wise, magic is more fun than the road.

'And-

Excellent service' she cried, and Aunt Margaret May rushed into the room thinking that she was killing A good beating is what this girl needs for what they thought was a good beating in her room with her things, that's what ninety-nine days out of a hundred, without television, entertainment or seeing others, to be in her doing things that only a few girls should do. Have you been beaten by something or have you done this to yourself, look at those wounds on them like canine marks? And in that room under the stairs, she looked a lot like Naddalin to be bad.

-And-

Oh, yes,' said Naddalin, she said it several times, she said it to Emma saying that this girl needs to get out of this environment and ordinary friends. I unanimously agreed.

Aunt Margaret May narrowed her eyes, saying, 'Damn, you don't have to be too harsh about a young little girl.'

'Oh, that's what you call it,' he said.

'She's just a little girl...'

'She's playing with her stuff... Like that evil stick looking for the sinner, that's enough. , the magic that she calls, I call sick temptations, which I love more holy will drive her out to hell because, if she does not confess either, and she will not do so, I will watch her there until she sees the true evil she seeks, as the saint also said.

'She's just a little girl...' She said, raising her hands to walk away... And like her, I don't feel her evil, which is just magic, not even like you with your dirty mind - there's nothing wrong with what you're doing there, if so.

'And I still don't like your accent, little girl,' he says, holding on to the Bible — which he never read, but wants to believe he did, saying that's what you need to know — 'I looked up saying - I know better than you - share it about you and what do you think of me, I can read, and I was chosen and she wasn't...

Blink - blink, that's what he did ... For his child.

'Damn, what does that mean?' he said as he closed the door in the girl's face.

She looked at the glass again and said- 'Trust-

For young girls, by God!

However, I trusted him...

I trusted Naddalin ...

Lakemont

Nadalin - so she said - like, if you can talk about being beaten, to others or it will get worse and the mother has nothing to say about all her strength by the father, in this capricious way, they do not hit you hard enough, to understand it, Emma says, then Nadalin says this is why - why, without a doubt, I will bring her back with us next year she can endure more of this abuse.

Both descended all the spiral staircases, with all these errors following each other and bringing the sounds closer, leading to the wide entrance to the castle, the main door - she was the greatest pianist, pumped tones, 20s made of wood, also enchanted, having glass doors, drum and objects playing rhythms.

Like in the hall, like I said, there's this ornate tubular organ, and downstairs, I was there, there's all these crazy-looking rooms that do everything, with air ballots, old belts, along with ancient medieval things, like more artillery than I've ever seen — a nickelodeon, old conical fortune telling machines, and things like that — more than — like — I've seen Absolutely, haunted dance bones, on chains suspended from a chain, forming the accused in the past, in the dungeons room after room, this tunnel after death, all lit by gas torches, dripping and damp are the stone walls cold to the touch, a mass grave in those reserved for girls like me, and yet I saw.

-Even-

Ginath watches us - jumps late in conversation, I would have written if I were you, I did more than that, I want you to 'please' make it clear that you agree with this little girl - with all the other older and younger girls, you need friends, love and understanding more than anything, she is not used to girls, who do this, besides falling in love with the wonders of all magical things.

Uncle Richard Reed was probably worried that Naddalin would forget their deal. Anyway, she suddenly changed the subject, for the little girl, it was in her mind, like a strange haunting whisper saying - silence and stopped, 'He was never part of the deal to calm her child away, and yet she would have done exactly that, he does not pay, I thought she was - mean - towards girls who could not defend themselves, because they are very young - and yet this girl has a voice, but no authority yet, will Change.

Did you hear the news this morning, Margaret May? What about this fugitive? Eh- more than the same she said, quietly, in a low voice.

When Aunt Margaret May began to feel comfortable, with all the drama of the little ones, more in the anarchy of rebellion in her opinion, and incompatibility with each other - when it was only because of one, and the other was staying with friends in the villages, Naddalin found herself thinking almost unrequited about life in dormitory number fourteen without them, with Emma and the other 4, who would be in that room with her, this year, Naddalin introduced The request - too early to share a room with her - it's Emma of course.

Uncle Richard Reed and Aunt Jinnath usually encourage the little girl to stay away, in times of play and times of rest, which Naddalin was very happy to do for her with a set up spell. Attached to her soul as long as she felt the need too, until the day when she can escape and stay with them.

On the other hand, Aunt Margaret May wanted this girl in front of her at all times, so that she could make suggestions for improvement, without being slapped, in my opinion, no better than. Her father's word was the law... All just because there were things in my room that she found wrong, and that she was a great girl.

She would be pleased to gain, her magical past with the Naddalin the better, Dariez is, Naddalin was even very happy to buy expensive Dariez gifts while they became stark, when they were sent home so that the house would open to them. .

As if she dares to ask her mother and father, the girl to tell them all why they do not have a gift, saying that I am the chosen one. She continued to throw dark hints at her studies about all things enchanted, magical, fantastical and charming, and what made them all unsatisfactory to her now.

You don't have to blame yourself for the way the girl turned out, read, after all, she admires her very much, we took her after all, she makes our children bad, with her wrong ways of searching for darkness. And if there is something rotten inside this child because I hit her well before she took care of herself, no one can help him, I will punish her for this sin...!

Dariez, asked if she could have a girlfriend for a sleepover, and if she would stay at home, to have lunch with her - on the third day of this week if she stopped all the madness and went back to looking emotionless, Dariez thought she was also falling them and what they wanted, when it was all my plain, For her to step back, as I took control of her mind, she has everything she needs now, with inside her a brilliant magician, then a white angel, and from there I have a feeling, but it's only if she believes in herself more than I believe in herself—and in them too.

-And-

Naddalin tried to concentrate on her food, in the large hall with many arched stained glass windows, but her hands trembled and her face began to burn with anger, saying that this little girl could not continue.

To remember the form, she thought to herself, to have them signed, and that it was not for her, was to renounce Dariez's well-being, and he made me, I take it, the moron did not remember that I was brought to him from here, think of Emmah - The Claepsiara, Havannah for the girls and Skoufyceol for the older girls of Wizardry and Fallen Angel's. Don't say anything, there was a whoosh- because they did a teleportation spell, and they were both there... Standing in front of them in the living room.

Don't get up, she says with - 'I'M HERE FOR THE GIRL, TO KEEP!'

Aunt Margaret May grabbed her glass of wine. 'It's one of the basic rules of animal husbandry, and she said, keep your child and teach it as you see fit.'

'What gives you the right, after we have collected your filth?

I was taking here...

,I'm at a place called Lakemont, it's somewhere in Pennsylvania, and it was the place to be, for all things cheap thrills...

I had the idea for a book I read called: LAKEMONT, I'm standing at the top of 1902 the Lep the Deeps 60 ' Roller Coaster - the oldest in the world, that if you miss a stage you will fall to death, everything is wooden and rickety, white and burst, rusty

chains and old heavy wooden cars, Upholstered and torn leather seats, which have not moved for years and big rusty cogs, it rains hard, all that is strange with a green flow, and all the light of the sky is lightning, see all the rides...

I walked through the hunt like the old Noah's ark – now stopped just tipped to one side. I would say that it is not what you would call a sacred place of pleasure - even if what was intended, more like an ugly sin, the ground completely gone, had to jump from place to place; Yet no one was stopping me from doing it - where there was no sign to stop me.

Yee- and the sound of whooping cough is no more. Yes, I could recall them in my consciousness, Noah is at the top look more sadistic than ever, most of the cars on the Ferris wheel are rusty and just hung, on a pin.

Ah—the big carousel, which once played sweet soothing music, seems to be playing in my mind as I walk past the merry-go-round—seeing young faces with amusement, now most houses are totally, entirely, entirely and entirely gone or labeled with race and insults, or ungrateful—on the eyes or the house has been stabbed.

The bias of the pot stands naked and strange in the dense fog hugging low, and the high color lost to the right. The water park looks like a swamp, the slides hell, like Disney's, yet you would make this jump. There are many ways I could kill myself... A lot... The broken blisters on the monkeys on the merry-go-round, the chipped, rusty, faded animals, but in my mind they are bright and flashing. The train stops, never again steaming... Missing track in some places where he used to nibble through the canopy of trees and over rivers, old buildings now really falling, even if they were made to look like that before.

The whip-ride had his roof exploded during a tornado years ago.

The costar has a dip, and the cars experience the resort from the first hill like all the previous ones. There is a prison opposite, where you could window shop, where you sold Harlan, when I was just a child. 'The Rollo Costar' had killed a 3-year-old boy - and to the life of a boy, who wanted to live like me - Dariez, the boy was sitting on the lap of a younger girl, and they said, that's all they have to close this park forever - so it would never be open again.

The Swan boat is half sunk - resembling howling ducks, in the swap it's yellow, it was once a crystal clear lagoon. Um- it has been said that the park has been bewitched, over the years with all the deaths, which have taken place here, on the wrinkles, one tour in particular the Skyliner COSTAR. The log ride motionless forever, with some parts resting on the ground below. Storybook freeze, loving like the biblical stories of hell.

Parachute ride is closed on the elevator, rusty, red, white, and blue. White wooden fence is no longer, clay walkway.

Riding a caterpillar, I remember when I was a child covering me, and I was afraid of the dark. Along with the chair swing ride, the wooden benches disappeared, and the fleshy, corroded, and corroded chains spread in the breeze, like haunted arms - for something demonic. The trolley is still sitting on the main street, street light, with cracked glass... Dead trees, dark brown, with what appears to be armed hanging want to take you and eat them ... It was beautiful at once - all willow skin - any.

Collapse like me from the inside, all the forgotten soul, all the old buildings, fall, I saw when trespassing to get here to my child carrying happiness, and like a ship, I feel the same. It is very difficult to talk when you want to kill yourself, on the loss of a girlfriend.

This is in the air and beyond everything else of things, and it's not a mental complaint I have, it's something physical like it's physically hard to open your mouth and make words come out, and they won't.

They don't come out smoothly and in defiance with your mind the way ordinary people's words do. I don't understand why, they come out in pieces as if they were from a crushed ice machine, like a snow piss you know a lemon that no one likes, however, if your dump like me you get it you can decide on anything but the girl you can never get. You sin on them as they gather behind your lower lip with your upper teeth.

So, you just keep silent, silent, and sound, and yet your mind never shuts down the whim.

'Have you ever seen how people watch TV in all the commercials on TV?' 'Pass it on, kid,' like my other acquaintances. 'No, yo-yo, that's right,' my other friend - another friend like - um - ah - and - ah. 'There's always someone in the coach unless it's an allergy declaration and he's in the field of... Blah - blah - hem and home - tube - fart, giggle.

'Or on a horse - with a creepy man who looks very sexy to a man or a donkey - he goes ha - or some shit dipped in wine in the middle, or some re-delayed pigs going to we-ee-ee-ee.' This will be 2019 on Earth, funny now I want a cupboard too. 'These ads are always for herpes, then men, and women who have a burning itching sensation at the bottom, and who have - vaginal night - us.'

Entertainment and joy. 'How do you tell someone you have that, and it's all for crap?' It's his home. 'This must be as strange as this tête-à-tête: 'Hey, before we do this, you must know...'

'Your mothers didn't mind last night?' 'Oh ha!'

'Girl!'

No...

(a week ago)

(Return of the week)

... Before Dariez turned 14...

Christopher punches her, the opponent. Richard is small and wears jewelry, and some gay think he's gay, and won't say. He once told me, Dariez, when a man wears his first piece of jewelry, there is no turning back, with all that is Vagish, and yet he lives it in the halls.

Richard shakes his wrist and turns his attention to fate. He punches his hand with a large silver bracelet on which he limps. He hits Christopher's watch, ringing. 'Son, what are you trying to do with my gold, you?' balsamic lines outline his light switch, and his bed sheet is filled with black circles. There is always a pot in Christopher's house. He has a room with a separate ventilation system and a lockable door whose parents can rent an additional apartment.

There are spots there too, shiny spots showing certain activities, occurring between Christopher and his girlfriend. Personally, I have to take one look at them (spots, then duo). I'm jealous... Yes - no - some - but again, I am beyond jealousy, more than them enough - of everything.

'Darry's?' 'Do you want?'

See if fate is the problem. Maybe that's what came and stole me. I do this every now and then, for a few weeks, and then smoke a lot of pot, just to test if it maybe, like not having it is what was stolen from me. It has been passed to me, folded into a brief transfer chart, however, I pass it on. I'm doing an experiment with my brain - like getting 3 - some with it.

'You, okay?'

That should be my name. I could be a superhero: you all

The right girl.

'Ah...' I'm stumbling.

'Don't bother Dariez,' Richard like. 'It's in the Daries area.'

It's Dariez out.'

'Yes.' I move the muscles that make me smile. 'I just... Sort of - you know...

Do you see how words work? They betray your mouth and walk away.

She has big eyes ... 'Are you okay?' asks Emma, by the way that was her name. Emma is Christopher's girlfriend, here on Earth, so there is no stranger about how she looks. She's in physical contact with Christopher at all times Emma I know she's a curious duo. At the moment, she is on the floor next to his leg, wrapped around and I know that Naddalin does not like it - by the smile she must impose on her face.

'I'm fine,' tell her - about this. The blue glow of the flat-screen TV in front of us bounces off her eyes as she returns to it. We are watching a special nature in the depths of the ocean, about a 14-year-old girl who was lost in a boat she made to become in memory, after being dropped by her boyfriend, and eaten by sharks.

I was immersed in the story holding behind their backs – Emma's hand behind him that was holding her hands in front.

~*~

Immahline

(The narrative began to say-)

I'm just a girl...

Age: 14-

My name is Imahline Marelli,

I was called the little girl and also called Emma as a nickname, but I am just a girl, but even so, I had a crazy idea, dreaming of being the first girl younger than a woman to do what I set out to do and in something he never did.

There I was day after day making my ship - nothing big, however it was what I thought it was right to make this trip, I lived mostly on the water where I grew up - in my hometown next to the harbor.

'Yes - how will my day come asking to look at me as if I were a nut girl.'

'Good!' - I say, not even looking at him, to see that he was wearing only those full underwear that resembled the yellow color of the age that was wiped at elasticity. Who was sipping his coffee, is not you doing this with or without his consent?

§

I remember taking a bite of my PP and J sandwich and half running down the top of my closet, which was pink, that perfume from a kiddie girl. The kind with which all the little girls spray a lot in the locker rooms after the lesbian teacher wants to look at you on the run. There the dog goes running after my sister who is 2 years old and then me, then the dog, who missed the step and hit the wall, however, I didn't look until I was working on my wooden boat for my cruise I was going to make it all!

Muscat also ... They - or no one would have stopped me from making my own making in the world. I wanted fame! And to be the strong girl!

I fight my way off the coast - on a clear day, no drive, no life jacket, nothing just I'm in a small boat making a big dream.

Yah, I'm normal, that's what a girl does on her summer vacation...

Lost at sea in Little Graces - where I ended up in one of the worst events of my life, tossing and flipping the waves, I think I'm going to die, 30-foot waves I go underneath, and above the boat never made to stand crashed, swaying like a cork in the 5,000-foot seawater.

Black is all I see, for 24 nights while trying to make it - of course in the Pacific alone, which is a stupid thing I just want to see if I can do it - to make history, lost at sea, it's day 5 after I left my small town port - I have no clue what is coming - some might say it was bad planning - others say it was just stupid. I only had a camera to talk to and I documented my story - sharks mocked me - they were nibbling at my feet.

Happiness, I can even think of a good thought other than the memories of life I had and left for this journey - to become a person - when I was... Someone there - with them - I think about each of them in my mind - and I get more adrift broken hatred in the ocean? Nothing I don't have at this time I feel like not seeing mom and dad kills me more slowly than living it swaying in the water with sharks swimming around me just looking at me with the intention of eating.

My happiness was to be at home, to be with my girlfriend on the weekend, and to spend time with my young friend too, who broke up with me just before this trip, I miss so much. It was everything to me... Maybe that's why I did this... To show him that I am a strong girl, I do not need him - but for now the tutorials I am sure I do.

My biggest fear is so far, that they will be eaten alive by them swimming around me. Not coming home and never seeing my friends and family, not doing something like homework, reading a book, or texting on my phone, things we take for granted.

Things you don't think about every day - things like warm and dry. Things like sitting with your dad – eating like a pig and firing the wind well when looking at the TV, and my waterfall-like mom saying you're not nice to your sister looking at you with these things - right there. I'm afraid of everything here in this dark water - which is so cold and becomes, hot as hell, and the sun has my skin - pilling and red, and then at night I feel like knives are hitting all the open wounds that their sharp teeth have inflicted on my legs and feet, passing through.

Death - I feel like I'm eating my body away, because they also gnaw it ... I see the light getting strange and strange ... Also. Loneliness, reaches me, there is no one for miles ... There is not a single soul to take - and all my pictures - my phone - and life has been swept away in the boat that is not at the bottom of the sea.

Sometimes this is now like the green of the blonde, color. My eyes are red from the salt water running as the high waves crash over my head. I know I see things, are not even there, I feel dizzy.

What trait do you denounce most in others? The only thing at the moment I could think of hating more now is he... Everything, I hate the world for me end up that way so God too... Why should this big storm have come, why should I have drowned, why? complete

Nose pounding - hitting - hitting - slap - and it exploded, yet I got one of my toes, big ... I can see fragments of my little boat around me but nothing prevents me from sinking to hold onto it. Um- I remember the first date we went to a fast food place, and not much of it was what he had, and his mother and father did not get - the United States! I never had a ring that didn't have money - yet I don't look back on the salt water sucking slowly and then I can handle it, I feel like it never was - at all the real one.

Oh - very dreamy - and yet - indifferent to me - the person, I would admire more than my father - the boy I love - and yet he also told me to grow up, to be a person, other than a grumbling little person, and look for someone else I love, even if... He? Him for his love for me - always he - my friend for being the first... And he took me - and took me anywhere I wanted to love the mall and to school and a football match, to the park for rides and more, or in his car for love, and even tying up and going out was the right person for me. With his dark hair, perfect smile, lips, face and green eyes. I was his short blond, thin, and slanderous, jumping in his arms when he said when, or jumping - and I said - like 'how high', feeding on each other's feeling and care.

My greatest extravagance was this and he made it on the other side where he would be there for me to jump into his arms - it wasn't until three days, and my body hadn't been fully consumed, by those sharks he was with: Amy Pierre - the girl who was

nicer than me - and better than me in everything? He didn't care much that I became shark poop, which is not fun because that's right, these were my last thoughts, pin and left to float in the bottle. Funny Day On The Beach Three weeks after they gave up looking for me his new girlfriend, read this... And panic!

Part: 1

I'm- going-

Cr-a-zzz-y- crazy-YYYY!

My short life passes before me - and I can't help but have hazy thoughts about all the days in the past and thought about a life with my boyfriend that I won't have - or work, or a job, or a dance, or a car... Or sweet 16. Even children - and this white dress! I just step on the water - eating - whatever it is just to dye life - and prevent it from wilting... To black dust in the scorching sun - very cold 17 degrees night.

If the boat was nearby, I would call out the star but there was nothing but my cold breath that echoed in my face, to show that I was alone - facing death, but then louder, I played until I had no strength left in my voice, I lost, I was a fan at school, for 2 years, I lost thoughts alone from the cold - no one comes to get you.

Trying to stay as still as possible, while waiting, trading, yes - no - they will pull you down and tear you apart ... I was there a new game - the shark was my pet - should I pet it or let it eat me? - As long as the shark is not actively attacking you - and get into the boat as soon as possible as soon as the boat reaches you. 'The life expectancy I've lived is full of experiences with misfortunes, yet I'm only 14 – so you have to capture humor whenever and wherever you can find it.' I remember the first three hours in the boat before all the lights went out, it was nice and I thought it was in the bag. Maybe it's important to open up to me people, other than a boy and some close girlfriends - people who are there with you, not thousands of miles away in another life. Or maybe something else. Perhaps, I should just settle on not knowing, that I would not be for anything. Maybe it's good to know that you're not the only one who doesn't know, exactly what you want.

I made the boat. I was the thing I was most proud of... Blue and white - made for no power on board - just for a 100-day trip at one cost to another - from Norfolk to Freeport - and over the triangle. It was also called stupid - knowing stories - what if. 90 mph and more, with the wind... I thought this was it - I say my buys are good - I have nothing but a camera to say all this too.

§

My current state of mind? Irrational, there are my other legs, I feel frustrated, there is nothing - nothing - nothing - my mind can't stand this ... I scream - I scream - I scream, I cry - and there is no sound - just more water comes from my eyes, I am flowing blood and the intermittent waves are now burning in a ruby red color, I will never feel what it is like to have a boy there either the dirty thought running through my crazy mind, that my hip was barely hanging on the rest of me. But do you feel sorry for me - I know you shouldn't - you were over my head... From the first five moments. Throughout a stupid boy - and him - means.

What do you consider the most exaggerated virtue? Thinking that they care about me my friends are, my friends, why should I have done this alone, why no one found me, these are all questions asked after the first five hours of this flight, I did not fly long enough. Was there a plan that wasn't really just a spiteful Victoria's Secret...?

And - like a stupid girl going for something that has not been done. Was I a liar and a deceiver? I was sneaking out with the girls, blaming my sister for what she did, that is, being a teenager ... I would play with skittles too is why I am to love ... And say I didn't—is that God saying no, why did I end up with why—it made me feel like I needed to touch there and I did more than six times one day that mistake? He was bringing me, to do like every day, but the teenage girl wants more. As I remember the first time he grabbed my breasts, oh that was so nice, and now I feel like I'll never feel loved... Again even if I manage to get out - alive - I don't have the bottom half...!

I remember last year my nose was bigger than them - I just got an ass and now a shark came and bit it - just my luck... I was crazy... Always to cover what is right, even if it was wrong it was to make sure the other person did not say. As I kissed another boy on the lips in front of him thinking that I would get him back, would God pay me for it now?

I was always the prep type - even looking, with a little pouf on my head and heavy, wavy heavy blonde hair. Everything I was a high school girl there was nothing about me I thought it was true, I wanted everything to be as steady as my nose and it was done 2 years back like my teeth and when I started wearing a lot of makeup to cover everything - and yet I am one of the best girls in my class or so they said.

5 days in all I have is a bit of wet candy bar... And I take the last bite of my favorite snake food. The boat was going fast. All my electronics have disappeared. Not long ago, even. I say now - the lack of testing my work in the small boat industry was not at the level of the ship's shape. I can say it now ...

'There's a great intensity of life that comes when we're not in control but just reacting, living and staying. I'm not a religious man of vision... But for me, going to the

sea is getting a glimpse of God's face. At sea, I remembered its insignificance by the insignificance of all men. It's a great feeling to be so humble.'

§

My dilemma has given me wealth of a strange kind. I will always remember the stupid, stupid girl who did this... The most important kind of remembering there was being stupid in life. You're doing something so stupid that you don't remember, maybe that's why I tried this... He said I was stupid, so I was up for it! I appreciate every moment that you don't spend in pain, despair, hunger, thirst, or loneliness.

Sometimes, I try to stop speculating about the future or what is outside of my being, and other times I take a step back and run with it because maybe, for the best, I think about what might not be what could have been.

Bigger days on my flight and lost at sea, far in the backseat, at night, sharks playing with my feet - not taking bits, but like rubbing me as they went by... She was- 'I'm just shy. Or maybe everything far away is pretty. It's like how the grass gets greener on the other side. The grass looks nicer on the other side. You know? The grass you're standing in looks like dirt with hair.

Well anyone find me or I'm dead?

A strange thing happens when Interviewing a robot. Feels like getting deep: to ask deep questions. I suppose it's an interspecies thing. Although if that's the case, I wonder why I never try to be deep about my dog. 12:07 Lost In the sea--teal and blue in the brew--'Like a planet round a star,' I look up, I see shooting nor that my death is coming.

My weight is surrounded by a parade of natural wonders, all glowing with moonlight. All is gleaming--In arithmetic, to order The little eco that's developing around me has been taking skin and more off of me - and the top and underwire have been taken off by me, so they won't weigh me down too much. A - So here I am, bobbing in a drink just as naked as I was with my boyfriend the first time, I have the same upside-down feeling in my little belly. Look below, it's amazing how all the color and life - yet so definitional at the same time - is so great yet so harsh to me.

Underneath a ballet of fluffy white clouds, acrobatic dorados perform. Then the sunset was just like that I was sitting and staring at which made me sad and happy too. Or the time I went for ice cream with my dad, and he gave me money for my first bike... when I was five. Or at that time, my mom and my sister, Gracie, and I were going out to the waterfall in the state park, at ten o'clock. And time with my son, at a table overlooking the sea—in a place of restraint his mother paid for.

Clouds slide across the sky until they join on the horizon to form a glowing, swirling sunset that is slowly engulfed by night. Then, as if the sun had suddenly been shattered, thousands of twinkling galaxies would drop into the deep black night. There is no country where the sky is greater than the sea. But I can't enjoy the amazing beauty around me. It falls out of my grasp, and makes fun of me. Knowing that it could be stolen from me at any time, by a dorado or shark attack or by a deflated raft, I cannot relax and appreciate it. It is beautifully surrounded by ugly fear. I write in my log that it is a view of heaven from a seat in hell.

I was thinking of a song I loved, old oldies from my dad's way back in their days, back in the '90s when dinosaurs roamed the planet and in the year or so when my older sister - Kylie was born in 1993 - I was born in 2002 and Bryan Adams - 'Please forgive me , That was crap, when my sister was little, that was fine, and I'm thinking crazy here too. Like - this was something I would blink on to pass the time, time to time, pop charts, for 2015. Funny that the cuts were marked - by the SIA!

§

What a person despises most is my frightful friend, Seeing the sun rising in a fairy tale day lost in the sea, A lightning bolt beside me, I thought I was going to fry... (Boom!!) Also, a hot feeling from the wave hit my face slapped hard. He despises someone I now think would be him, and I am sorry to say I never of my family life, to do what was right.

The greatest love of your life will be him, you silly one! I feel anyway... What I loved about him - and the boys I loved - 'Well, I like a smart funny guy :) Like him, I don't like him being too serious all the time! From a mainly laid back smart joker, (: what adjective is Like it more in a guy? I like guys who try at school. They have to be nice and make me laugh. Also, I like guys who can carry on a conversation, and that's athletic. If you like a girl don't talk to her about other girls because it makes them think you're not interested , I like smart, athletic kids and they must have good clothes! I like it when a guy wears a pullover sweater, it's very sexy...I got lost in my latest sexy thoughts...Also a bonus-can read and write-however-boys of the day- You might ask for a lot. Also, make sure you smell good!

That's a big turn on.'

When and where was I happiest? I was happiest in life, when I was rushing on his arms and he was holding me, or when the school day was at the end and he was there to take me places, and I worked in This trip I was the most coveted or of all those who die in a heartbeat, as if I had less of those too A, and it's getting harder to breathe. What talent would you like to have the most? My talent was swimming and being in the water as I said I have been practicing swimming now for a week in the middle of the sea. Like I

said I took longer than I should have. To be loving, a friend, a good student...and also-and take care of everyone!

Every time you look up at the stars, it's like stepping into my past days and thinking. I can be anyone anywhere now. However, I know - I'm out here in the Pacific... I was well wondering looking at that starry sky if he thinks of me often - I now know that's not true.

Things, things I've been wanting to do this summer are camping in the backyard with your best friend, with my 11 year old sister's friends who are mine too many of them were younger than me but still my girlfriends. Driving lessons with my older sister, stopping at the edge of town, looking at the same stars. Walking down a wooded avenue, kissing in the moonlight, look up and you'll be eleven again. Small-town boys, like I did when I was 10, ate candy and thought about fatness like I did then. You're in a seagoing dinghy, and you flip out, It's me... You're staring at the back of the car. Here is where the world begins and ends, it is as if nothing ever stops happening.

It's not a great note except for one thing—doing it—and being a little girl, there's nothing to remind me of, and you've probably forgotten my name, like them already. Even if the shark swam away, you're not really safe until you're out of the water, but that's not going to happen, right now? Sharks may leave for a while and then come back to continue attacking. Get back to shore or back to the boat as fast as you can imagine. If I could change one thing about you it would be everything - I never like anything about me I'm 14 what can I say that's why I did this to make me - to something, if I could color the hair might be light brown. .. And use different lenses, but this does not change the course of life.

Sharks- Sometimes, they swim straight up and nip it, sometimes they circle for a while before swooping in, and sometimes they sneak up from behind for a surprise attack. In order to be able to defend against the shark, you must know where it is, so do your best to keep an eye on the animal, even while you are running away, I try to stay calm and not make sudden movements. When you first spot the shark, it will likely swim away without disturbing you.

You can't swim out of the shark, so trying to run to safety may not be your best option, unless you're very close to shore. It is important to keep your wits about you so that you can constantly assess the situation and know how to get to safety. I thought this was thought, what I consider your greatest achievement, I have never done.

Part: 2

I love-love-love-long nails painted, in all colors, say long pony, and my style is like it-honestly, not much changed from last year. Basic pieces are the best because you can wear them in so many different ways! I've been getting a lot of plain T-shirts and jackets, so you can wear them with scarves and jewelry. It's probably a good idea to wear

a basic pair of dark jeans, as well as leggings and maybe yoga pants. As for shoes, Sperry shoes are popular at my school. People also wear Converse, Crocs, Nikes, Ugg's, and any kind of girl's shoe - any! Skinny jeans...and Victoria's Secret lingerie!

My iPhone has been my life... my dearest possession? What were my favorite TV shows? 'Pretty Little Liars', 'The Secret Life of the American Teenager...' and anything on MTV, as was also the case in 2015, I'm sure. If you were to die and come back as a person it would be like my sister who was perfect in every way. So, I will know what it feels like to be the main girl.

I knew all the sharks were gone now, I was hitting them all in the face and gills. Dead play will not deter an aggressive shark. Your best bet if you are attacked is to make the shark see you as a strong and believable threat. Usually, a hard blow to the shark's gills, eyes, or snout causes it to retract; These are the only weak areas on the shark.

When I got back in the water I yelled - to my mom, that's something a girl my age would never do...

I sure most shark attacks happen all the time but not to a girl swimming trying to stay above the chasing waves, I never thought of sharks - not that In order to get out inside even for the fact that my boat would sink in a bigger storm the storm was Hurricane

Patricia Duration May 28 - June 4 Peak Intensity 145 mph (230 km/h) (1 min) 937 mbar (hPa,) I know that mom and dad They were weathering this storm, on TV they know I'm in there but they thought I was strong...that's what matters here, they thought I could do it...yet they didn't go tell me go get me. My friend was quoted as saying - 'He didn't even care...'

There are many opinions out there and you should be searching the internet for different sources and articles about attacks and sharks. A true understanding of one's own insignificance benefits a calming sense of complete connection with the greater whole. As a small part of the world and humanity, I felt more peace now, more loss of life than I do in this moment, yet I have never felt so alone. And I slid off and ate, never to see or hear a thing again.

Just a girl like you at the age of 14 - lost at sea - it was me - and how, I will remember her!

Part 3

With

giant, translucent ears, he flips through the water in the cool light of a submarine. 'Holy shit, look at that, son!' Richard is like, puffing smoke, I don't know how she got back at him earlier.

I have a secret: I wish I were Dumbo the Octopus. I smile to myself. 'The scientists have humorously named this specimen Dumbo,' says the TV narrator. I was wallowing there quietly, yeah, the freezing temperatures of the ocean depths have been modified. The great concerns of my life may be the kind of bottom-feeding slime, which is not much different from now, and which is desirable that I would have no natural predators; Then again, I don't have anything right now, and it didn't do me much good. But it suddenly made sense: I'd like to be under the sea, like an octopus.

'I'll be right back,' I said, getting up from my spot on the couch, to which Scruggs, the friend who had fallen to the floor, promptly claimed, gliding in one smooth motion.

'You didn't call the number five,' he's like.

'One five?' I'm trying.

'Too late.'

I shrug and climb over the clothes and people's legs to the beige door that looks like the front door to the apartment; I move through that, right:

Christopher's warm bath.

I spend a lot of time on them.

I have a system with bathrooms.

Whenever I visit Christopher, I continue with my usual routine of wasting time. Turn off the light first.

They are sanctuaries and public places of peace scattered all over the world for people like me.

Then I sigh...and think of all the things I can get like her...

then I turn, face the door I just closed, pull down my pants, fall on the toilet, and not sit down; I fall like a carcass, feeling my butt a quarter of the edge.

Then I put my head in my hands and breathe because, well, ya know, pee.

I bury my face in my hands and hope it lasts forever because it feels so good. You do that and it's over. It takes no effort or any planning.

I always try to enjoy it, feel it, and understand that my body is doing something it has to do, like eating, even though I'm not very good at it.

I wonder if anyone does this?

You don't put it off. I think that would be spoiled. If you have such problems you did not pee. Like anorexia, except with urine. If you consider it as a punishment for yourself.

I finished and poured out, stretching behind me, my head still down.

Then I get up and turn on the light.

(Has anyone noticed I was here in the dark? Did they see the lack of light under the crack and notice it like a cockroach? Did Emma see?)

Then she looked in the mirror - she did.

I look very normal.

I look the same as I always did before last year's fall.

Dark hair, dark eyes, and clenched teeth. Large eyebrows that meet in the middle. Long, somewhat crooked nose.

Naturally, large pupils, not fate that blends with the sepia to make two large saucer eyes, holes in me.

Tufts of hair above my upper lip.

This is Dariez...

and-and-and I always look like I'm about to cry.

In a few seconds, I'll have to turn back and face the crowd.

But I can sit in the dark on the toilet a little more, right?

I put hot water and put it on my face to feel something.

I always manage to make a trip to the bathroom to take five minutes.

I - Dariez, lived next door to the park, see and I've been trespassing there for years.

At school for kids like me, they feel like they're

hurt themselves... 'How are you kid?' asks Dr. Ross.

Her desk has a floor-to-ceiling bookshelf, like all shrink desks, and I guess that's what it is so far - I don't know much about anything if you want to know about me.

I-Daris, I used to not call them shrink, but now that I've been through so much, I feel empowered to. It's an adult term, and it's rude, and I'm more than 2/3 of an adult and I'm bad-mannered, so what the hell is that.

A very thick book... I don't have much in there - I only have one big thing, but I know all about it by skimming.

There are wonderful things out there. Like all shrinking desks, however,

The Bookshelf was packed with required reading. First of all, there's the DSM, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, which lists every kind of mental disorder known to man—it's an interesting read.

There is a disease called Ondine's curse, in which your body involuntarily loses the ability to breathe. Can you imagine? You have to think 'breathe, breathe' all the time, or stop breathing.

Most people who get it die.

I don't think you can find a DSM II. It came out in 1963 or something. It takes them nearly ten years to get one out, and they're working on VI. Jeez, I could be shrunk. If the contraction is neat, you'll (often, for an ally) get a bunch of DSMs, because they come in different versions- III, IV, and V being the most common. Now, in addition to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, there are a variety of specific books on mental disorders, such as The Freedom from Depression Workbook. Anxiety and Panic Attacks: Their Cause and Treatment, and the Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.

Always hardcover. No paperback books in a shrink office.

Usually, there's at least one book about pedophilia, like The Wounded Heart, and one of them shrinks to notice me looking at it and saying, 'This book is about pedophilia.'

And-- I was like, 'Oh hum?'

And she said, 'It's for people who have been abused.' And I nodded as if it were on top of my head.

'Are you? I'm lost in space--'

She had the face of a little old lady, this face, with a shock of white hair, and I never saw her again. What kind of question was that? Without a doubt, I was not abused. If I were, things would be that simple. I had a trigger for being in shrinking offices, right now?

I had an explanation and something I could work on.

The world will not give me an ordered thing.

'I'm good. Well, I'm not okay - here I am.

'Is there something wrong with that?'

'definitely.'

'I came here a while ago.'

Today she has a red jacket and red lipstick in the same red color. It's as if she went to the paint store to match them. Dr.. Ross always has such amazing outfits. It's not that she's particularly sexy or pretty; It just cuts itself so well.

'I don't want to come here.'

Well, you're in a process. How are you?' This is her quick question. Always shrink one quick question. I have someone who said 'what's up?' 'How are we?' and even- 'What's going on in Darice's world?' They never change. It's like their jingle.

'I didn't wake up well today.'

'Did you sleep well?'

'You slept well.'

Maybe they're the ones making all the money on TV. Then they have the audacity to charge my mom \$150 an hour. Maybe they do... They're just too greedy. She looks just like a stone, staring straight ahead. I don't know how they do this: the face of poker psychology.

Psychologists should play poker.

'What happened when you woke up?'

I had a dream - I dream all the time, just like the garden I loved as a child, I also share it with.

I don't know what it was, but when I woke up I had this awful realization that I was awake. It hit me like a brick in the groin.

'Like a brick in the groin, I see.'

I didn't want to get up. I was having a much better time sleeping. And that's sad. It was like a reverse nightmare as if you were waking up from a nightmare, you are so relieved. I woke up in a nightmare.

'And what is this nightmare, Dariez?'

'life.'

'Life is a nightmare.'

'yes.'

We stop. I think the cosmic moment. Oh, are you having a nightmare? We need to spend ten seconds thinking about that.

'I lay down on the bed.'

I think and don't think, then I do some more...

'What did you do when you realized you were awake?'

I didn't eat the night before. There were more things to tell her, things to hold onto: like the fact that I was hungry in bed this morning.

I went to bed exhausted from my homework and knew when I hit the pillow, that I would pay for it in the morning, that I would cross the line where my stomach would become so needy that I could eat nothing; That I'm going to wake up hungry, I woke up with my stomach screaming, emptying itself under my tiny chest.

I do not want to eat. The thought of eating made me hurt even more. I couldn't think of anything, not a single food item that I could handle, except coffee yogurt, and I was sick of coffee yogurt. I didn't want to do anything about it.

Only pure impulse, the one thing that never let me down, got me out of bed after fifty minutes. My fists pushed my stomach into itself, tricking it into thinking it was full. I rolled onto my stomach and raised my fists and held them in my gut as I was praying. I held this position, snug, my mind spinning, seconds ticking away.

'I woke up when I had to pee.'

'Show.'

'That was great.'

'You like to pee.' I mentioned this before.

'yes. it is easy.'

'You like simplicity, boy.'

'Isn't it all and sundry?'

'Some people thrive on complexity, Dariez.'

'Well, not me. As I was walking here, I was thinking... I have this fantasy of being a bicycle messenger.

'Uh-huh.'

Part 4:

It's going to be very simple and straightforward, and you'll pay me for it. It

'll be an anchor.

' How about school, Darice? You have an anchor school.

'The school is everywhere. It's turning into a million different things.

'Your tentacles. '

I have to hand it over to her. Dr. Ross picked up my language very quickly. Tentacles are my term - tentacles are the evil missions that invade my life. Like, for example, the American history class I received last week, which necessitated me writing a paper on Revolutionary War weapons, which forced me to travel to the Metropolitan Museum to check out some old weapons, which led me to take the subway, which necessitated being away from my cell phone and email for 45 minutes, which meant I wasn't near an average of 98.7 (body temperature which meant I couldn't answer the mail. The collective sent by asks my teacher who needs extra credit, which means that other kids deducted the extra credit, which means I won't get 97 in class, and that's what I needed to get,) which also means I won't go get into a good college, if I keep going like this, which means I won't get a good job, which means I won't have health insurance, which means That I would have to pay huge amounts of money for shrinkage and the medications my brain needed, which meant that if I kept working, I wouldn't have enough money to pay for a good lifestyle, which meant I would be ashamed, which meant I would be depressed, and that was the big amount because I knew what you did to me: He made it - o I wouldn't get out of bed, which eventually led to homelessness. If you can't get out of bed long enough, people come and take your bed away. Unless I get cancer in balls and have to cut nuts, everything will be fine - right? Yah - no!

There are no claws. There's just a pile of tasks you're dealing with. You don't have to deal with other people. The opposite of the probes is anchors. Anchors are the things that occupy my mind and make me feel comfortable temporarily. Ride my bike anchor. The work of flashcards is an anchor. Watching people play video games in Kristopher's is an announcer. The answers are simple and sequential. There are no decisions.

I admit that there are a lot of tentacles. But I have to be able to deal with them. The problem is that I am too lazy.

'How are you lazy, Dariez? '

" I waste at least an hour every day lying in bed. Then I waste time in speed. I waste time thinking. I waste my time quiet and not say: like - like - like - anything - because I am afraid that I have a speech disorder. '

'Do you have a problem with hesitation and stuttering? '

When I'm depressed, it won't happen right away. I will follow in heaven. 'I see.' She's writing something on her legal notebook.

Dariez, this will score in your permanent record.

The partisan line is that some of the deeper facts about us are things we stop saying in the middle, but I think they do that to make us feel important. One thing is certain: no one in life says to me, 'Wait, Dariez, what would you say? '

'I don't -' I shake my head. 'Jump off the ship's old thing.' 'What? What did you want to say?' This is another trick to shrink. They never let you stop in the middle of thought. If you open your mouth, they want to know exactly what the purpose of saying was.

I was going to say I don't think, but I don't, but I do it all the time, like - like - like stuttering, a real problem. I just think it's one of my symptoms.

As well as trimmers...

'Like sweating. '

'Okay. '

Sweating is terrible. It's not as bad as not eating, but it's weird, cold, sweat bleeding cold, smelling like skin is concentrated on my forehead, and it should be wiped every two minutes.

People noticed. It's one of the few things people notice.

'You're not stuttering now.'

This is paid for. I don't want to waste time.

Stop. Now we have one of our silent battles. I took a look at Dr. Ross as she looked at me. It's a contest about who will crack first. She puts poker on her face; I don't have any extra faces to wear, just Darry's natural face.

I want to feel my mind slip back into the hole it was supposed to be in, rest there the way it was before the fall of last year, when I was young and smart, and my teachers said I had an incredible promise, and I had an incredible promise, and I spoke in class because I was passionate and intelligent about the world. We closed our eyes ...

I'm waiting for her to say something deep, I'm always there, even though it will never happen. I'm waiting for her to say 'Dariez, what you need to do is X' and for the transformation to happen. I want there to be a very bad transformation. I want the transformation very bad. I'm waiting for the phrase you'll summon. It will be a miracle in my life. But is Dr. Ross a miracle worker? No, she is a skinny brunette lady from Greece with red lipstick.

It breaks first.

'Regarding riding your bike, you said you wanted to be a messenger. '

'Yes. '

'You already have a bike, right?'

'Yes. '

'And you ride it too much? '

'Not much. My mom won't let me ride her to school. But I walk around Knox on weekends.

'What does it feel like to ride your bike, Darry's?'

I'm stopping. '... Geometric. '

'Geometry. '

'Yes. Like, you have to avoid this truck. Do not hit your head with these metal pipes. Make a really. The rules are determined, and you follow them.

'Like a video game.'

'Absolutely. I love video games. Even just to watch. Since I was a kid. '

'Which you often refer to as' back when you're happy."

'Isn't it...?' I'm smoothing my shirt. I dress up for these small meetings too. Good khaki and white shirt. We dress for each other. We should go for some coffee and make a scandal - the Greek therapist and her high school boyfriend. We can be famous. This would bring me money. This may make me happy

'Do you remember some of the things that made you happy? '

'Video games.' laugh.

'What's funny? '

" I was walking in place that day, and behind me was a mother with her baby, and the mother was saying, 'Now, Joey, I don't want you to complain about it. You can't play video games 24 hours a day. And Joey says, 'But I want to!' and then I turned around and said, 'Me too.' -

Is - wanting to play video games for twenty-four hours a day? '

Or watch. I just want not to be me. Whether it's sleeping, playing video games, riding my bike, or studying. Give my mind. This is important.

'You're very clear about what you want.'

'Yes. '

'What did you want when you were a kid? Back when you're happy? What did you want to be when you grew up? Dr. Ross is a good shrink, I think. That's not the answer. But it's a very good question. What did I want to be when I grew up?

'My mind is like a spare toilet tossing everywhere !!!'

I remember arriving that night at the amusement park. The park was forgotten for the rest of its time. Ferris' wheel screamed in the light breeze. Merry-go-round tours have collected dust from not being used for many years. I had to be careful not to fall over the discarded objects that are everywhere. The light was fading, so he used his lamp to see obstacles. It was a rat running from the beam of light that disturbed his search for something to eat, and a cow looking at me with a glitter in her eyes to catch mine.

Finally, I arrived at the amusement park. It seemed deserted, and I was at the top of the ride, the roller coaster, where I was going to jump. I could see everything so far away, what was left of the Ferris wheel creaking in its rusty bearings when the wind blew over the area. The horses that were going in Merry-go-round had a thick layer of dust on their saddles. No child will ride them again. It got dark early this time of year, so I got a flashlight from the car. I didn't want to step on some ground covering garbage.

'Maybe not, maybe so.' What a short answer, maybe you don't see everything you think you're doing. I can't stand maybe this light - a little boy.

I have to make money, and make sure you're lucky too. 'I don't think there are a lot of markets for that.' I told Dr. Ross, 'I wanted to make maps.' 'Cities.' 'Maps of what?' 'On the computer?' 'No, by hand.' 'I get it, I get it. '

We'll talk more about money next time. We have to stop now.

Take a look at the clock. 7:05. She always gives three extra minutes.

'What are you going to do when you leave, Dariez? '

She always asks for it. What will I always do?

I'm going to go home and get scared. I'm going to sit down with my family and try not to talk about myself and what's wrong. I'll try to eat. Then I will try to sleep. I'm afraid so. I can't eat or sleep. I'm not doing a good job in terms of being a functional human being, you know?

Soldier, what's up?

I can't sleep and I can't eat, sir!

What if I pump you full of the commander, soldier, will it motivate you?

I can't tell, sir! Maybe I still can't sleep or eat, just a little heavier than lead.

Get up there and fight, soldier! The enemy is there! The enemy is very strong. I can't fight them. They are very smart.

You're smart too, soldier. Not smart enough.

So, you're just going to give up?

That is the plan.

'I'm going to keep it up,' Dr. Ross told. That's all I can do. I will continue with it and hope it gets better.

'Are you taking your medication? '

'Yes. '

'Do you see Dr. Barnthey? '

Dr. Garnini is a psychopharmacology. He's the one who prescribes me medication and sends me to urinate like Dr. Ross. He is a journey on his way, a little fat Santa with rings fixed in his fingers.

'Yes, later in the week. '

'You know to do what he says.'

Yes, doctor. I'll do what you say. I'll do what you all say.

Here, I gave Dr. Ross the check from my mother.

When I was four, this is how it was:

One was cold, the other hot, and the other really hot red. Two millimeters was not enough. I burned myself on it and my father, who didn't realize ('it should only be hot in the afternoon'), wrapped it in dark grey foam with duct tape, I remember there was a green pipe and a red and white tube the tube was assembled near the corner of the hallway just before the bath, and once I was able to walk, I checked them all, went up to them and put my palm about 2 millimeters away from each one to test if the atmosphere Hot or cold.

Our family lived in a bad apartment in Knox.

But, however, the duct tape never stopped me, and I thought the foam was fun to pick and chew, so I picked it up and chewed it, and then when the other kids came to my house, I dared to touch it. - Exposed tube I told them, everyone who entered had to touch

it, otherwise it was a, a word I learned from my father watching TV, which I thought was great because it is a word that has two meanings: the cat that girls like, and the thing that I called people to make them do things.

Just like the chicken had two meanings: the bird that walked around and the white stuff you ate.

I didn't know it was crappy at the time, for the reason that I didn't have our better apartment to compare it to yet. But there was exposed piping. That's no good. You don't want to raise your child in a house with exposed piping.

Some people touched the hot pipe if you called them pussy as well.

Part: 5

I had my room... but I didn't like to be alone in it; the only room...

I liked to be in was the living room, under the table that held all the brochures.

I made it my little fort; I put a blanket...

Yes, a blanket over me and worked in there...

Yeh- yeah- yepper- with a light that Dad rigged up...

I worked on maps...

I worked on drawings...

Drawing is something that I love...

I loved maps... too...

I knew that we lived in Knox and I had a map of it, a Knox Five or so Boroughs parts - with all the streets laid out.

I knew exactly where we lived, on the cover of 11 Street and 5rd Avenue.

Third Avenue was a yellow street because, it was an avenue, big and long and significant.

Fifty-Third Street was a little white street that went across Knox.

The streets went sideways and- and the avenues went up and down; that was all you had to recall. (Dad helped me remember, too, when we went out for pancakes.)

He would ask, 'Do you want them cut in streets and avenues, Dariez?'

And- and- And I'd go- 'Sure!'

And- and... he'd cut the stack of pancakes in a grid, and we'd name each street and avenue as we went along, making sure to get on the Ave. and- and- 5th Street.)

It was so simple... so simple...

If you were forward-thinking (like- um- ah- I- I was, duh) ... you knew that traffic on the even streets went east (East for Even) and the odd streets went west (West is Odd.)

Then, every bunch of streets, there were fat yellow streets, like the avenues, that went both ways. These were the famous streets: 41th St., 32nd St. The complete list from the bottom up was 11 St., Jender St., Smaith St., 13th St., 25th St., 34th St., 42nd St., 57th St., 72nd St.

(there wasn't any big street in the 60s; they got shafted,) 79th St., 86th St., 99th St., and then you were in Harlem, where Knox effectively ended for little white boys who made forts under encyclopedias and studied maps.

As soon as I saw the Knox map...

I wanted to draw it...

I should be able to draw the place where... um, where...

I - I- I'd myself for one and one only like existed, lived, and serviced.

So-o...

I asked Mom for tracing paper and she got it for me, and I brought it into my fort and I pointed the light right down on the first map of the town - downtown... where, where, ah- where 17th Street was, and the run-of-the-mill market worked.

The streets were crazy down there; they didn't have any kind of streets and avenues; they just had names and they looked like a game of Pick-Up Sticks.

But- but- but- ah- ooo- before, before, be-for-e- I- I could even worry about the streets, I had to get the land right. Knox was actually- truly- built on the property.

Sometimes, like sometimes-ssss- when they were digging up the streets you saw it down there- real dirt!

And the land had a certain curve to it at the bottom of the island, like a dinosaur head, bumpy on the right and straight on the left, a swooping majestic bottom.

I held my tracing paper down and tried to trace the line of lower Knox.

I couldn't do it.

I mean, it was ridiculous... outlandish...

My line didn't have whatsoever to do with the real one.

I didn't understand I- I- I was holding the tracing paper steady.

I looked at my small hands, and wonder- I think about everything and nothing at all. 'Stay still,' I told it...

I crumpled up the paper and tried o'er.

The line wasn't right again. It didn't have the swoop...

I crumpled up the paper and tried again, why- why-why- oh never mind- I thought.

This line was even worse than before.

Knox looked square... slanted...

I tried again... frustrated...

Oh boy, now it looked like a d*ck.

Crumple... shit- shit- fracking sucking a d*ck sh*t...

(girl looks up at me, rolling her eyes)

• (I thought he was cute then-)

Now it looked like a turd, another word I picked up from

Dad... who came to the school to see me...

Crumple... I suck... not dick like the drawing but something...

Now it looked like a piece of fruit... yet, dick-ish nonetheless...

It looked like everything- all things... but what it was supposed to look like:
Knox.

I couldn't do it... piss-balls...

I didn't realize- realized- then that when you trace stuff, you're supposed to have a tracing table, lighted from below, not a trembling four-year-old hand, and locks to hold the paper straight...

So-o so, I just thought I was a letdown to all-and me too.

They always said on TV you could do anything you wanted, but here I was trying to do something, and it wasn't working. I would never be able to do it. I crumpled up the

last piece of tracing paper and started sobbing, my head in my hands in my fort. Mom heard me.

Joy why are you here-

I cut...

'Dariez?'

'What? Go away.'

'What's wrong, honey?'

'Don't open the curtain! Don't open it! I have things here.'

'Why are you crying? What's the matter?'

'I can't do it.'

'What's the matter?'

'Nothing!'

'Tell Mommy, come on. I'm going to open the blanket'

'No!'

With her occupied, I ran across the room, streaking tears, wanting to get to the bathroom, to sit down on the toilet with the light off and splash hot water on my face.

But Mom was too quick. She shoved the encyclopedias back and loped across the room, swooping me up in her thin arms with the elbow skin that you could pull down. I beat my palms against her.

I jumped at her face as she pulled the blanket aside, bringing it taut under the encyclopedias. Mom threw her hands up and held the books in place, saving both of us from getting clobbered.

(A week later, she'd have Dad move the encyclopedias.)

'Dariez! We do not hit Mommy!'

'I can't do it I can't do it I can't do it!' I hit her.

'What?' She hugged me tightly, so I had no room to hit.

'What can't you do?'

'I can't draw Knox!'

'Huh?' Mom drew her face up and away from me, looked me in the eyes. 'Is that what you were trying to do down there?'

I nodded, sniffled.

'You were trying to trace Knox with the tracing paper I bought you?'

'I can't do it.'

'Dariez, no one can.' She laughed. 'You can't just trace freehand. It's impossible!'

'Then how do they make the maps?'

Mom paused.

'See? Voir? Someone can do it!'

'They have the equipment, Dariez. They're grown-ups and they have special tools that they use.'

'Well, I need those tools.'

'Dariez.'

'Let's buy them.'

'Honey.'

'Do they cost a lot of money?'

'Honey.'

Mom put me down on the sofa, which turned into a bed for her and Dad at night, and sat next to me. I wasn't crying anymore. I wasn't hitting anymore. My brain was all right back then; it didn't get stuck in ruts. 'Dariez,' she sighed, looked at me. 'I have an idea.'

Instead of spending your time trying to trace maps of Knox, why don't you make your maps of imaginary places?'

And that was the closest I've ever come to an epiphany.

I could make up my city. I could use my streets. I could put a river where I wanted. I could put the ocean where I wanted. I could put the bridges where I wanted, and I could put a big highway right across the middle of town...

Like -LIKE- like... Knox should have but, but, didn't. I could make my subway system. I could make my street names. I could have my grid stretching off to the edges of the map. I smiled and hugged Mom.

She got me some thick paper- white construction paper. Later on, I grew to prefer straight computer paper. I went back under my fort and turned the light on and started on my first map. And I did that for the next five years-whenver I was in class, I didn't doodle, I drew maps. Hundreds of them. When I finished, I crumpled them; it was making them that was important. I did cities on the ocean, cities with two rivers meeting in the middle, cities with one big river that bent, cities with bridges, crazy interchanges, circles, and boulevards. I made the cities. That made me happy. That was my Anchor. And until I turned nine and turned to video games, that was what I wanted to be when I grew up: a mapmaker.

Part: 6

My family shouldn't have to put up with me.

They're good people, solid, happy.

Sometimes when I'm with them III thinks I'm on television.

We live in an apartment-a much better one than the Knox one, but still not good enough, not something to be proud of-in Knox.

Knox is a big fat blob with its ugly shape across from Knox; it looks like Jabba the Hutt counting his money.

Its bridges connect to Knox and it's split up by Jenders and creeks-filthy green streaks of water that remind you that it used to be a swamp. There are brownstones-limestone and maroon houses that stand

Like- like fence posts and always have Indian men refurbishing them-and everybody goes crazy for those, pays millions of dollars to live in them. But other than that, it's a pretty status less place. It's a shame we moved out of Knox, where all the real people with power live.

The walk from Dr. Ross's office to our apartment is a short one but loaded with mocking stores. Food stores. The absolute worst part of being depressed is food. A person's relationship with food is one of their most important relationships. I don't think your relationship with your parents is that important. Some people never know their parents. I don't think your relationships with your friends are important. But your relationship with air- that's key. You can't break up with air. You're kind of stuck together. Only slightly less crucial is water. And then food. You can't be dropping food to hang with someone else. You need to strike up an agreement with it.

I never liked eating traditional American things: pork chops, steak, rack of lamb ... I still don't. Never mind vegetables. I used to like the foods that come in abstract shapes: chicken nuggets, Fruit Roll-Ups, hot dogs. I liked junk food. I could demolish a bag of Cheez Doodles; I'd have Doodle- Cheez so far infused into my fingertips, I'd be

tasting it on myself for a day. And so, I had a good thing going with food. I thought about it the way everyone else did; when you're hungry, you have some.

Then last fall happened, and I stopped eating.

Now I get mocked by these groceries, pizza places, ice cream stores, delis, Chinese places, bakeries, sushi joints, McDonald's.

They sit out in the street, pushing what I can't enjoy. My stomach shrank or something; it doesn't take in much, and if I force in a certain amount it rejects everything, sends me to the bathroom to vomit in the dark.

If he would just relax, let the rope go, I'd be able to give him all the food he wanted. But he's down there making me dizzy and tired, giving extra tugs as I pass restaurants that smell like fat and grease.

It's like a gnawing, the tug of a rope wrapped around the end of my gullet.

There's a man down there and he wants food, but the only way he knows to ask for it is to tug on the rope, and when he does, it closes up the entrance so-0 I can't put anything in.

My stomach wants no part of it. Everything is forced. The food wants to stay on the plate, and once it's inside me, it wants to get back on the plate. When I do eat, it's one of two experiences: a battle or a Slaughter. When I'm bad-when the Cycling is going on in my brain-it's a Battle.

Every bite hurts.

People give me strange looks: What's wrong, Dariez, why aren't you eating? But then there are moments when it comes together. The Shift hasn't happened yet- yet- yet-maybe it never will, but sometimes-just enough times to give me hope my brain jars back into where it's supposed to be.

When I feel- one of these: (I call them the Fake Shifts) I should always eat, although I don't; I sometimes stubbornly, foolishly- dumbly- III try to hold the feeling, and- and get things done while my mind can operate, and neglect to eat, and then...

I'm back where... I started.

But oh, when I slip back into being okay when I'm around food, watch out.

It's all going in. Eggs and hamburgers and fries and ice cream and marmalade and Fruity Pebbles and cookies and broccoli...

And- and- and- even-and noodles and sauce... Screw you; I'm going to eat all of you.

...I play with my food and she is looking at me with a look that, I give the dog when she is taking a shit, in the yard.

I'm Joy, she was over the way...

Torah- a woman- I don't know when my body chemistry is going to line up to let me eat again, so you are all getting in me right now.

All my cells take the food in and they love it and they love my brain for it and I smile, and I am full; I am full and functional and I can do anything, and once...

I eat-this is the amazing part-once I eat, I sleep, I sleep as I should...

III-

And that feels so-o mmm- good...

I eat it all, and the man is away from his rope.

He's busy down there eating everything- all things- that falls inside, running around like a chicken with its head cut off, the head on the floor, munching on all the food of its own... like- like a hunter who just brought home a kill... or were I form on the side of the road... yet- never-mind...

...And- but then- and- but- and, I wake up and the man is back, my stomach is tight...

...And I don't know what it was that got me to have a

Slaughter eating experience...

It's not pot... It's not girls... yet I never really had one of those, just the thoughts of...

It's not my family... yet, yet, yet- their love is strangling me...

I've- I- I- ongoingly like to-to think it must just be interaction- or A-sexual, in which case we're looking for the Shift and we haven't found it yet-yet.

Part: 7

(Back)

'Dariez?'

'Hi, Mom.'

The night is here except for a thin gray at the edge of the sky, and the trees are thick with rain, and the drizzle is pissing on me as I come up to my house...

No sunsets in spring. I lean in and ring the buzzer, streaked bronze from years of use-the most used buzzer in the building.

It growls deeply, amplified by the lobby...

(Lobby... Mailroom- mailbox, more like, just a compartment for mailboxes.)

I throw open one door and then the other. It's warm in the house, and it smells like cooked starch. The dogs greet me. (now)

'Hi, Sarrah...

Hi, Jordan...'

(Back)

They're little dogs...

My sister named them...; she's nine.

Sarrah is a mutt... not her the dog...

My- my- father says he's a cross between a Chihuahua and a German shepherd... which must've been some wild dog sex... they had, until last year I thought that was the only way girls and boys did that too...

I hope the German shepherd was the man...

Or else the German shepherd girl probably wasn't too satisfied...

Sarrah has a pronounced under-bite; he looks like two dogs where one is eating the other's head from below, but when I take him for a walk, girls love him and talk to me.

Then they realize- thought of- figure out- what I'm young and or messed up, and they move on.

Jarddan, a Tibetan spaniel, looks like a small, brown lion.

He's small and cute but completely crazy.

His breed was devised in Tibet to guard monasteries. When he came into our home, he at once fixated on the house as a monastery, the bathroom as the most sacred monastic cell, and my mom as the Abbess. You can't go near my mother without Jarddan protecting her.

When she's in the bathroom in the morning, Jarddan has to be in there with her, placed upon the counter by the sink as she brushes her teeth.

Jarddan barks at me. Since I started losing it, he started barking at me. It's not something any of us mention.

'Dariez, how was Dr. Ross...?'

Mom comes out of the kitchen. She's still tall and skinny, looking better each year. I know that's weird to think, but what the hell- she's just a woman who happens to be my mom.

It's amazing how she looks statelier and more confident as she gets older.

I've seen pictures of her in college and she didn't look like much. Dad is looking like he made a better decision every year.

'It... was okay.' I hug her. She's taken such good care of me since I got bad; I owe her everything and I love her, and I tell her these days, although every time I say it, it gets a little diluted. I think you run out of I love you.

'Are you still happy with her?'

'Yeah.'

You can't afford to get anyone else, I think, looking at the crack in the wall next to my mom. This crack in our front hallway has been there for three or four years.

Dad paints over it and it just reracks. We've tried putting a mirror on it but it's a strange place to put a mirror- on one side of a hallway- and my sister started calling it the Vampire Mirror to tell if people who came into the house were vampires, and it came down after a few weeks when I came home stoned and stumbled into it.

'Because, if you're not we'll get you someone else.'

Now there's an exposed crack again. It's never going to get fixed.

'You don't need to get anyone else.'

'How's your eating? Are you hungry?'

Yes, I think. I am going to eat the food my mom made me. I'm still in control of my mind and I have medication and I am going to make this happen.

'Yes.'

'Good! To the kitchen!'

I go in, and the place is all set for me. Dad and my sister, Sarah, are sitting at the circular table, knives, and forks in hand, posing for me.

'How do we look?' Dad asks, banging his silverware on the table. 'Do we look hungry?'

My parents are always looking into new ways to fix me. They've tried acupuncture, yoga, cognitive therapy, relaxation tapes, various kinds of forced exercise (until I found my bike,) self-help books, Tae Bo, and feng shui in my room. They've spent a lot of money on me. I'm ashamed.

'Eat! Eat! Eat!' Sarah says. 'We were waiting for you.' 'Is this necessary?' I ask.

'We're just making things homier for you.' Mom brings a baking pan over to the table. It smells hot and juicy. Inside the pan are big orange things cut in half.

'We have squash'-she turns back to the stove-rice, and chicken.' She brings over a pot of white rice with vegetable bits sprinkled over it and a plate of chicken patties. I go for them a star-shaped one, a dinosaur-shaped one. Sarah grabs at the dinosaur-shaped one at the same time.

'The dinosaurs are mine!'

'Okay.' I let her. She kicks me under the table. 'How're you feeling?' she whispers. 'Not good.'

She nods.

Sarah knows what this means.

It means she'll see me on the couch tonight, tossing and turning and sweating as Mom brings me warm milk. It means she'll see me watching TV, but not really watching, just staring and not laughing, as I don't do my homework.

It means she'll see me sinking and failing. She reacts well to this. She does more schoolwork and has more fun. She doesn't want to end up like me. At least I'm giving someone an example not to follow.

'I'm sorry. They're trying to do a big thing for you.'

'I can tell.'

'So, Dariez, how was school today?' Dad asks. He forks into the squash and looks at me through his glasses. He's short and wears glasses, but as he says, at least he has hair-thick, dark stuff that he passed on to me. He tells me I'm blessed; the genes are good on both sides, and if I think I'm depressed now, imagine if I knew I was going to lose my hair like everyone else! Ha.

'All right,' I say.

'What'd you do?'

'Sat in class and followed instructions.'

We clink at our food. I take my first bite- a carefully constructed forkful of chicken, rice, and squash-and mash it into my mouth. I will eat this; I chew it and feel that it tastes good and rear my tongue back and send it down. I hold it. All right. It is in there.

'What did you do in... let's see... American History?'

'That one wasn't so good. The teacher called on me and I couldn't talk.'

'Oh, Dariez...' Mom is like.

I start constructing another bite.

'What do you mean you couldn't talk?' Dad asks.

'I knew the answer, but... I just...' 'You trailed off,' Mom says.

I nod as I take in the next bite. 'Dariez, you can't keep doing that.'

'Honey-' Mom tells him.

'When you know the answer to something, you have to speak up for yourself; how can that not be clear?'

'We know... Your mother and I know and we're doing everything we can to help you. Right?' He looks across the table at Mom.

'Yes!' 'Me too,' Sarah says. 'I'm doing everything I can, too.'

'That's right.' Mom reaches across to ruffle her hair. 'You're doing great.'

'Yesterday, I could've smoked pot, but didn't,' I say, looking up, curled over my plate.

'Dariez!' Dad snaps.

'Let's not talk about this,' Mom says.

'KID'S- We had buttons put down over there is no one taking care of her, and she was old...'

Dad takes in a heaping forkful of squash and chews it like a furnace- and said 'um- hmm.'

'Don't jump on him,' Mom says, they were not happy about it at all.

'I'm not, I'm being friendly.' Dad smiles.

'Dariez, you are blessed with a good mind. You just have to have confidence in it and talk when people call on you. Like you used to do. Back when they had to tell you to stop talking.'

'It's different now...' the third bite.

'But you should know; it's important. I'm doing experiments with my mind, to see how it got the way it is.'

'What are you talking about?'

'Not around your sister,' Mom says. 'I want to tell you some news about Jarddan.' Hearing his name, the dog walks into the kitchen, takes up his position by Mom. 'I took him to the vet today.'

'So, you didn't go to work?'

'Right.'

'And that's why you cooked.'

'Exactly.'

'So, you want to know what happened at the vet?' 'It's crazy,' Sarah says.

'We took him in for the seizures he's been having,' Mom says.

'And you'll never believe what the vet said.'

'What?'

'They took some blood tests last time, and the results came back I was sitting in the little room with Jarddan; he was being very good. The vet comes in and looks at the papers and says,

'These numbers are not compatible with life.'

I'm jealous of her. Can you be jealous of your mom for being able to handle things? I couldn't take a day off, take a dog to the vet, and cook dinner. That's like three times too much stuff for me to get done in one day. How am I ever going to have my own house?

I laugh. There's a bite on my fork in front of me. It shakes.

'What do you mean?'

'That's what I asked him. And it turns out that a dog's blood sugar level is supposed to be between forty and one hundred. You know what Jarddan's is?'

'What?'

'Nine.'

'Ruff!' Jarddan barks.

'Then'-Mom is laughing now there's some sort of another number, some enzyme ratio level, that's supposed to be between ten and thirty, and Jarddan's is one-eighty!'

'Good dog,' Dad says.

'The vet didn't know what to make of it. He told me to keep giving him the supplements and the vitamins, but that he's a medical miracle.'

I look over at Jarddan, the Tibetan spaniel. Pushed-in shaggy face, black nose, big dark eyes like mine.

Panting and drooling. Resting on his furry front legs.

'He shouldn't be alive, but he is,' Mom says.

I look at Jarddan more.

Why are you bothering?

You've got an excuse. You've got bad blood.

You must like living; I guess I would if I were you. Going from meal to meal and guarding Mom. It's a life. It doesn't involve tests or homework. You don't have to buy things.

'Dariez?'

You shouldn't be able to be alive and you are. Do you want to trade?

'I... I guess it's cool.'

'It's very cool,' Mom says. 'It's by God's grace that this dog lives.'

Oh, right, God. Forgot about him. He's, according to Mom, going to have a role in me getting better.

But I find God to be an ineffectual shrink. He adopts the 'do nothing' method of therapy. You tell him your problems and he, ah, does nothing.

'I'm done,' Sarah says. She picks up her plate and trots out of the room, calling to Jarddan. He follows.

'I can't eat any more either,' I say.

I've managed five bites. My stomach is churning and closing fast. It's all such inoffensive food; I shouldn't have any problems with it.

I should be able to eat three plates of it. I'm a growing boy; I shouldn't have trouble sleeping; I should be playing sports! I should be making out with girls.

I should be finding what I love about this world. I should be frickin' eating and sleeping and drinking and study and watch TV and be normal.

'Try a little more, Dariez,' Mom says. 'No pressure, but you should eat.'

That's...

Right...

I'm going to eat. I slice off the top of the squash, in streets and avenues, a big chunk, and put it on my fork and get it in my mouth. I'm going to eat you.

I chew it, soft and yielding, easily molded into a shape that fits down my throat. It tastes sweet. Now hold it. It's in my stomach. I'm sweating.

The sweating gets worse around my parents. My stomach has it. My stomach is full of six bites of this meal. I can take six bites. I won't lose it. I won't lose this meal that my mom has made. If a dog can live, I can eat. I hold it. I make a fist. I tense my muscles.

'Are you okay?'

'One second,' I say.

I lose...

My stomach hitches as I leave the table.

What were you trying to do, soldier?

I was trying to eat, sir!

And what happened?

I got caught thinking about some crap, sir!

What kind of crap?

How I want to live less than my parents' dog.

Are you still concentrated on the enemy, soldier?

I don't think so.

Do you even know who the enemy is?

I think... it's me.

That's right.

I have to concentrate on myself.

Oui. But not right now, because now you're going to the bathroom to throw up! It's tough to fight when you're throwing up!

I stumble into the bathroom, turn off the light, close the door. The horrible thing is that I like this part because when it's over I know I'll be warm; I'll have the warmth in me of a body that has just been through a trauma. I bear down on the toilet in the dark- I know just where to go -and my stomach hitches again and slams up at me, and I open up and groan. It comes out, and I hear my mother outside, sniffing, and my dad muttering, probably holding her.

I grip the handle and flush a few times, alternating filling the toilet and flushing it. When I'm done, I'll go to sleep, and I won't do any homework; I'm not up to it tonight.

And I think as I'm down there:

The Shift is coming. The Shift has to become.

Because like- if you keep on living like this you'll die.

Part: 8

That's Joy... She's one of the teens. Did they tell you about the renovations?

Yes.

How old are you?

14 um - no 15.

She looks stressed out for 15. You need to relax. Get a girlfriend or something, you know.

- I'm working on it.

- M-mm-hmm.

So, what is it you- do here, exactly?

Same thing as you.

Are you a patient?

What were you doing in the emergency room this morning?

ER has the best coffee, son.

They just let you out?

No.

So why am I depressed? That's the million-dollar question, baby, the Tootsie Roll question; not even the owl knows the answer to that one. I don't know either.

All I know is the chronology.

Two years ago, I got into one of the best high schools in Knox: Executive Pre-Professional High School. It's a new school set up to create the leaders of tomorrow; corporate internships are mandatory; the higher-ups of Merrill Lynch come and speak to classes and distribute travel mugs and stuff.

This billionaire philanthropist named Robberts lets- let's set it up in conjunction with the public school system, like a school within a school-all you have to do to get in is passing a test. Then your whole high school is paid for and you have access to 800 of the smartest, most interesting students in the world- not to mention the teachers and visiting dignitaries.

You can come out of Executive Pre-Professional High School and go right to 17th Street, although that's not what you should do; what you should do is come out and go to Harvard and then law school.

That's how you end up being, like, President.

I'll admit it: I kind of want to be President.

So, this test-they named the Robberts Lutz Philanthropic Exam, in honor of his philanthropies-became fairly important in my life. It became more important than, uh, food, for instance.

I bought the book for it-Robberts Lutz puts out his line of test prep books for his test-and started studying three hours a day.

I was in seventh grade, and I got comfortable with my room for the first time I'd come home with my heavy backpack and toss it on the bed and watch it bounce, toward the pillows as- II-I's sat down in my chair and pulled out my test-prep book.

On my cell phone, I would go to TOOLS: ALARM... and set me up for a two-hour practice exam...

There were five practice exams in the book, and after I did them all, I was thrilled to discover an ad at the back for twelve more Robberts Lutz test prep books...

Joy- I remember- I went to Barnes and Noble; they didn't have all of them in stock-they'd never had anyone ask for all of them, them-so they had to put in an order for me.

But then it was game on. I started taking a practice exam every day.

The questions covered the standard junk that they test you on to determine if you're not an idiot:

Reading comprehension. Ooh. Can you read this selection and tell what kind of tree they're trying to save?

Vocabulary, did you buy a book full of weird words and learn them?

Math- are you able to turn off your mind to the world and fill it with symbols that follow rules?

I made that test my bitch. I mauled the practice exams and slept with the books under my pillow and turned my brain into a fierce machine, a buzz saw that could handle anything. I could feel myself getting smarter, under the light at my desk. I could feel myself filling myself.

Now, I stopped hanging out with a lot of friends when I got into the Executive Pre-Professional mode. I didn't have many friends to begin with-I had the kids who I sat with during lunch, the bare minimum-but once I started carrying flashcards around, they sort of avoided me. I don't know what their problem was; I just wanted to maximize my time. When all of my test-prep books were done, I got a personal tutor to shore me up for the exam. She told me halfway through the sessions that I didn't need her, but kept my mom's \$800. I got a 100 on the test, out of 100.

The day I got those test results, a cold, plaintive, late fall Knox day, was my last good day. I've had good moments scattered since then, times when I thought I was better, but that was the last day I felt triumphant. The letter from Executive Pre-Professional High School came in the mail, and Mom had saved it on the kitchen table for me when I got home from Tae Bo class after school, which was something I intended to keep doing in high school, to have on my extracurricular activity sheet when I applied for college, which would be the next hurdle, the next step.

Me- 'Dariez, guess what's here?'

I threw down my backpack and ran past the Mirror in the living room to the kitchen. There it was: a manila envelope.

The good kind of envelope. If you failed the test, you got a small envelope; if you got in, you got a big one.

'Yes!' I screamed. I tore it open.

I took out the purple-and-gold welcome packet and held it up like the holy grail. I could have used it to start my religion. I could have made, yah' know, love to it. I kissed it and hugged it until Mom said, 'Dariez, stop that.

That's very sick...

How about you call your friends?'

She didn't know, because I never told her, that my friends were a bit estranged. They're sort of ancillary anyway, friends. I mean, they're important- everybody knows that; the TV tells you, but they come and go. You lose one friend; you pick up another. All you have to do is talk to people, and this was back when I could talk to anybody. My friends, when I had them, pretty much just ragged on me and took my seat when I left the room anyway.

Why did I need to call them up?

Except for Kristopher, Kristopher was a real friend; I guess I'd call him my best friend. He was one of the oldest guys in my class, born on that cusp where you can be the youngest person in an older class of the oldest in a younger class, and his parents did the right thing and went with the latter.

He was smart and fearless, with a flop of brown curly hair and the sort of glasses, that made girls like him, square black ones. He had freckles and he talked a lot. When we got together, we would start projects: an alarm clock torn apart and distributed over a wall, a stop-motion video of Lego people having sex, a Web site for pictures of toilets.

I had met him by wandering over to the table during lunch with my head buried in flashcards, sitting down, having one of his friends ask me what I was doing there, and having him come by, flush with tacos, to rescue me, ask what I was studying. It turned out that he and I were taking the same exam, but he wasn't studying at all-didn't believe in it.

He introduced me to the table conversation about what Princess Zelda would be like in bed-I said she'd be terrible, because she'd been locked up in dungeons since puberty, but Kristopher said that'd make her super-hot.

Kristopher called me that Friday night.

'Want to come over and watch movies?'

'Sure.' I was done with my practice test for the day.

Kristopher lived in a small apartment in a big building in downtown Knox by City Hall. I took the subway in (my mom had to okay it with Kristopher's mom, which was horrifying,) identified myself to Kristopher's paunchy doorman, and took the elevator up to his floor.

Kristopher's mom greeted me and brought me into his ventilated chamber (past his dad, who wrote in a room that resembled a prison cell, occasionally beating his head against his desk, while Kristopher's mom brought him tea) and flopped on his bed, which

wasn't yet covered with the sort of stains that would define it in the future. I'm good at flopping on things.

'Hey,' Kristopher was like. 'You want to smoke some pot?'

Oh. So-o this was what watching movies meant. A quick recap of what I knew about drugs: my mom told me never to do them; my dad told me not to do them until after the SATs.

Mom trumped Dad, so I vowed to never do them-but what if someone made me? I thought drugs might be something people did to you, like jabbing you with a needle while you were trying to mind your business.

'What if someone makes me, Mom?' I had asked her; we were having a drug conversation in a playground.

I was ten. 'What if they hold a gun to my head and force me to take the drugs?' 'That's not really how it works, honey,' she answered. 'People take drugs because they want to. You just have to not want to.'

And now here I was with Kristopher, wanting to. His room smelled like certain areas of Central Park, down by the lake, where white guys with dreadlocks played bongos.

My mom hovered in my head.

'Nah,' I was like.

'No problem.' He opened a pungent bag and put a chunk of the contents of the bag in a fascinating little device that looked like a cigarette but was made of metal. He lit it up with a butane lighter that made a flame approximately as large as my middle finger. He puffed right up against his wall.

'Don't you have to open a window?'

'Nah, it's my room; I can do what I want.'

'Doesn't your mom care?'

'She has her hands full with Dad.'

The section of wall he smoked against would get discolored over the next two years. Eventually, like the rest of the room, it would get covered up with posters of rappers with gold teeth.

Kristopher took three or four breaths of his metal cigarette and made the room smell musty and hot, then announced:

'Let's motivate, son! What do you want to get?' 'Action.' Duh.

I was in seventh grade.

'All right! You know what I want?' Kristopher's eyes lit up. 'I want a movie with a cliff.'

'A mountain-climbing one?'

'It doesn't have to be about mountain climbing. Just needs at least one scene where some dudes are fighting, and somebody gets thrown off a cliff.'

'Did you hear about Paul Stojanovich?'

'Who's that?'

'He's the producer who invented World's Scariest Police

Chases and Cops.' pretty much just ragged on me and took my seat when I left the room anyway. Why did I need to call them up?

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'Who's that?'

'He's the producer who invented World's Scariest Police Chases and Cops.'

'No kidding? The host?'

'No, the producer. The host kicks ass, though.'

Kristopher led the way out of his room and past his father- typing away, wiping sweat, for all intents and purposes a part of the computer-to his front door, where his mom, who had long dirty blond hair and wore overalls, stopped us and gave us cookies and our coats.

'I love my life,' Kristopher said. 'Bye, Mom.' We entered the elevator with our mouths full of cookies.

'Okay, so what were you saying? I love World's Scariest Police Chases.' Kristopher swallowed. 'I love it when the guy is like' Kristopher put on a stern overenunciated brogue-'These two-bit bandits thought they could turn a blind eye to the law, but the Broward County Sheriff's office showed them the light-and it led them straight to jail.'

I cracked up, spitting cookie bits everywhere. 'I'm good at voices. Do you want to hear Jay Leno blowing the devil? I got it from this comedian Bill Hicks.'

'You never let me finish about Paul Stojanovich!' J'ai dit.

'Who?'

The elevator arrived in Kristopher's lobby. 'The pro-duc-er of World's Scariest Police Chases.'

'Oh, right.' Kristopher threw open the glass lobby door. I followed him into the street, tossed up my hood, and bundled myself in it.

'He was posing with his fiancée, for like a wedding picture? And they were doing it in Oregon, right next to this big cliff. And the photographer was like 'Move back, move a little to the left.' And they moved, and he fell off the cliff.'

'Oh my God!' Kristopher shook his head. 'How do you learn this stuff?' 'The Internet.' I smiled.

'That is too good. What happened to the girl?'

'She was fine.'

'She should sue the photographer. Did they sue him?'

'I don't know.'

'They better. I would sue. You know, Dariez'- Kristopher looked at me steadily, his eyes red but so alive and bright-' I'm going to be a lawyer.'

'Oh, yeah?'

'Yeah. Screw my dad. He doesn't make any money. He's miserable. The only reason we even live where we do is that my mom's brother is a lawyer and they got the apartment way back when. It used to be my uncle's apartment. Now he does work for the building, so they cut Mom a deal. Everything good I have is due to lawyers.'

'I think I might want to be one too,' I said.

'Why not? You make money!'

'Yeah.' I looked up. We were on a bright, cold, gray Knox sidewalk. Everything cost so much money. I looked at the hot dog man, the cheapest thing around- you wouldn't get away from him without forking over three or four bucks.

'We should be lawyers together,' Kristopher said. 'Pardis and... what's your last name?'

'Gilner.'

'Pardis and Gilner.'

'Okay.'

I'm awakened by a guy in light blue scrubs taking my blood. That's an interesting way to wake up. The guy comes into the room with cart-carts are very popular here-as light creeps through the blinds.

'I need your blood. For downstairs.'

'Uh, okay.'

I present my arm. I'm too beating to ask any questions. He takes a little bit of blood expertly through the back of my hand under my middle-finger knuckle-doesn't leave any kind of mark-and rolls along, leaving

Muqtada asleep, or awake and paralyzed by life; it's tough to tell. I want to get more sleep, but once you've been stuck, you're inclined to get up, so I move out of bed and take a shower with the hospital-provided towels and my parent-provided shampoo and the generic soap that I pump out of the wall. The shower is searing and wonderful, but I don't want to stay too long- I have to break my habit of languishing in the bathroom- so I dry off and drop my stuff back at the nurses' station. Smitty isn't there; instead, there's a big guy who introduces himself as Harold and tells me to dump the towels in a hamper that looks just like a garbage can by the dining room, something that I know I've seen Humble and Jim dump apple cores and banana peels into.

'Hey, buddy, you're up!' Armelio calls out, bounding down the hall at me. 'How'd you sleep?'

'Not good. I needed a shot.'

'That's okay, buddy, we all need shots once in a while.'

'Heh.' I crack the day's first smile. Armelio uncorks one of his own.

'It's time to wake everyone up for vitals,' he says, treading down the hall. 'All right, everybody! Vitals!'

Time to take your vitals!'

A caravan of my fellow bleary mental patients- or wait, I think we're called in-patient psychiatric treatment recipients, technically emerge from their compartments, rubbing their eyes and staggering as if they have a job to get to and they just need that first cup of coffee. Surprised by my good fortune, I put myself at the front of the line and become the first to get my blood pressure and pulse taken. 120 / 80. I continue to be the picture of health.

'Dariez?' Harold, the big guy, asks when everyone is done.

We shook hands, maintaining our stride, nearly clotheslining a frilled-up little girl walking in the other direction. Then we turned up Church Street and rented this reality DVD, *Life Against Death*, which had a lot of cliffs, as well as fires, animal attacks, and skydiving accidents. I sat propped in Kristopher's bed, him smoking pot and me refusing, feeding off him, telling him that I thought I was getting a contact high when really- I was just feeling like I had stepped into a new groove. At cool parts of *Life Against Death*, we paused and zoomed in: on the hearts of explosions, spinning wheels after truck crashes, and one guy freaking out in a gorilla cage and getting a rock thrown at him. We talked about making our movie someday. I didn't go to sleep until four, but I was in someone else's house, so I woke up early-at eight with that crazy sleeping- at-someone- else's house energy. I passed Kristopher's father at his computer and grabbed a book off their shelf in the living room-Latin Roots. I studied Latin Roots all morning, for the test.

We kept doing it. It became a regular thing. We never formalized it, never named it... but on Fridays, Kristopher would call and ask me to watch movies. I think he was lonely. Whatever he was, he became the one person I wanted to stay in touch with after junior high. And now, a year later, I was in my kitchen holding my acceptance letter and wondering if he had one too.

'I'll call Kristopher,' I told Mom.

Part: 9

'Yeah?'

'You haven't been filling out your menus.' 'Every day, you're supposed to put down what sort of meals you want. On one of these.'

'What are those?' She holds up what looks like a placemat, with columns of food: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner. 'You should have gotten this in the welcome packet the nurse gave you.' Ah, the one

I completely ignored it. I nod. 'I just... didn't...'

'It's okay, but if you don't mark up your menus, you're going to get a meal we pick for you every time. So, fill one out for lunch and dinner today. For breakfast, you're going to have to have one of the omelets.'

I put my elbows down on the desk and eye the menu choices: hamburger, fish nuggets, French-cut beans, turkey with stuffing, fresh fruit, pudding, oatmeal, orange juice, milk 4oz, milk 8oz, 2% milk, skim milk, tea, coffee, hot chocolate, split pea soup, minestrone- soup, fruit salad, cottage cheese, bagel, cream cheese, butter, jelly... highly

processed food. I'm not going to have a problem eating this. My eyes swim over the choices.

'Circle what you want,' Harold explains. I start circling.

'If you want two of anything, put two-x by it.' I start putting 2x's.

I'm asking for something that no politician is going to provide, something that probably you only get in preschool. I'm asking for preschool.

I wish the world were like this if I just woke up and marked the food I'd be eating, and it came to me later in the day.

I suppose- and asked- it is like that, except you have to pay for whatever you want to eat, so maybe what I'm asking for is communism, but I think it's deeper than communism-I'm asking for simplicity, for purity, and ease of choice and no pressure.

'After breakfast, fill one out for tomorrow,' Harold says as I hand in my menu.

Breakfast comes to the dining room and the omelet is like a science experiment: is the lack of cheese explained by the mysterious holes that dot the alleged egg?

'Your first omelet,' Jim says. Today, for a change, I sit with him instead of Humble. Johnny rounds out the table.

'It's gross.' I pick at it.

'It's like a rite of passage,' Tim says. He speaks slowly and without any accents in his words.

"Everyone must eat the omelet." 'Yeah, you're in now,' Jim says.

'Huh.' Tim exhales.

'How did everybody sleep?'

I try... Night joy- she is in the same room as me...

'I'm anxious, really anxious,' Joy says.

'Why?'

'I've got that interview tomorrow, with the adult home.' 'What's that?'

'Huh.' Joy exhales. 'It's where people like us live.'

'It's a place like this, basically, except you have to hold a job,' Joy explains. 'You don't need a pass to leave; you can leave whenever you want, but you have to prove you're employed and be back by seven o'clock.'

'Wait, you can leave here with a pass?'

'Yeah, once you have five days inside, they have to give you a pass if you ask for it.' 'I'm going to try and be out in five days.'

'Huh,' Joy exhales. 'Good luck.'

I start in on my orange, which is about two hundred times more edible than the omelet. 'Why are you nervous about the interview?' I ask Joy. 'Anxious, not nervous. It's different. It's medical.'

'Why are you anxious, then? I'm sure you'll get in.'

'You can't be sure of a thing like that. And if I mess it up, I've got problems: I've been here too long; my coverage isn't going to last. Once you're giving the tours, it's timed to leave.' He takes a slow bite of oatmeal. 'The last place wouldn't let me in because I'm too much of a picky eater. It's not like- this place. You can't pick your food.'

'So now you know what not to say!' I point out.

'Yeah, that's true.'

'See, when you mess something up,' I muse, 'you learn for the next delight. It's when people compliment you that you're in trouble. That means they expect you to keep it up.'

Joy nods. 'Very, very true.'

'Huh, yeah,' Joy says. 'My mom was always complimenting me, and look how I turned out.'

'This kid has some promise.' Joy laughs. 'He's on the level.'

'Huh, yeah, on the level. You play guitar, kid?'

'No.'

'Joy here's a great guitarist,' Joy says. 'Great. He had a deal in the eighties.'

'Oh yeah?'

'Sh-hh,' Joy says. 'It isn't nothing.'

Joy continues: 'He can play better than the guy they bring in here to play for us. But he's a cool guy, that guy.'

'Yeah, he's on the level.'

'He's on the level. Is he coming in today for the group?'

'That's tomorrow. Today is art.'

'With Lacey.'

'Right.'

Joy sips his coffee. 'If there wasn't coffee on this earth, I'd be dead.'

I scan the room: everyone's here but Solomon, the Anorexics (who I've now seen peeking out of their rooms like, literally, skeletons in closets,) and Joy.

I wonder where she is. She didn't show up for vitals. Maybe she's out on a pass.

I hope she'll be around tonight for our date. Technically, it'll be my first date. 'You know, I'll tell you why I'm anxious,' Joy pipes up, leaning in over his coffee. 'It's this stupid shirt.' He pushes forward his Marvin the Martian WORLD DOMINATOR sweatshirt. 'How'd I going to... interview in this?'

'Huh.' Joy exhales. 'Never under-shaft the power of Marvin.'

'Sh-hh, man. I'm serious.' 'I have shirts,' I say.

'What?' Joy looks up.

'I have shirts.'

'I'll lend you a shirt.'

'What? You would do that?'

'Sure. What size are you?'

'Medium. What are you?'

'Uh, child's large.'

'What is that in normal?' Joy turns to Joy.

'I didn't even know children had sizes,' Joy says. 'I think it would fit,' I stand up. Joy gets up next to me and, although his posture is way different- backward, really-he looks like a decent match.

'I have a blue-collared shirt that my mom makes me wear to church every week. I can have her bring it.'

'Today? The interview's tomorrow.'

'Yeah. No problem. She's two blocks away.'

'You would do that for me?'

'Sure!'

'All right,' Joy says. We shake hands. 'You're really on the level. You're a good person.' We look into each other's eyes as we shake. His are still full of death and horror, but in them I see my face reflected, and inside my tiny eyes inside his, I think I see some hope.

'Good person,' Joy echoes. Joy sits down. I put my tray back in the cart and Humble comes up behind me.

'You didn't sit with me, I'm very hurt,' he says. 'I might have to jump you for your lunch money later.'

Joy leads me into the bright hall with his odd gait.

'Everybody's in the dining room right now.' He gestures as we go down the sideways hall, the one that branches off of the one I entered. I look left- there's the dining room, painted blue, overlooked by a television, full of circular tables, separated from the hall by that glass with the square wire mesh in it. Inside, the tables have been pushed aside, and a panoply of people sit in a loose circle.

I can't even process them: they're the moteliest collection of people I've ever seen. An old man with a crazy beard (what happened to the shaving?) rocks back and forth; a gigantic black woman rests her chin on a cane; a burned-out-looking guy with long blond hair puts his hand through it; a stocky bald man with slatted eyes scratches his armpit and frowns; an older woman with glasses mimes what appears to be an eagle, talking, before turning and inspecting the back of her chair. The small man I saw in the hall twitches his leg. A girl with a streak of blue in her dark hair slumps over her chair like she's more messed up than the others; a big girl with a wan frown leans back and twiddles her thumbs; a black kid with wire-rim glasses sits perfectly still, and hey there's from downstairs. He's still got his stained shirt on, and he's looking up at the lights. They must have processed him quickly because he's a return visitor.

You can tell who the meeting leader is: a thin woman with short dark hair. Out of a dozen or so people, she's the only one in a suit. Some people aren't even in their clothes, but in dark blue robes, loose and V-necked at the top.

'Hey, man,' Joy says, pulling me down the hall. 'If you're interested you can just sit in on the meeting.'

'No, I-'

'I'm doing the tour, so I can get out.'

'Heh.'

'Now, smokers are at-wait, you don't smoke, do you?'

'Uh ... I smoke some things-'

'Cigarettes, I'm talking about.'

'No, I don't.'

'Did they ask if you did?'

'No.' 'That's probably because you're underage. How old are you?'

'Fifteen.'

'Jesus! Okay, well, smokes are after breakfast, after lunch, at three in the afternoon, after dinner, and before lights out. Five times a day.'

'All right.'

'Most people smoke. And if you had told them you smoked, they might have given you cigarettes.' 'Darn.' I chuckle.

'It's one of the only hospitals left that lets you smoke.' Joy points behind us. 'The smoking lounge is in the other hall.'

We come across a third hall, perpendicular to the one we're in. I see that Six North is shaped like an H: where you enter is at the bottom of the left leg; the nurses' office is at the junction of the left leg and the centerline; the dining room is at the intersection of the center line and the right leg, and the rooms line the left and right legs.

We're passing them now, going toward the top right of the H: they're simple doors with slots outside filled with slips of paper that say who's living in them and who their doctor is. The patients are listed by their first names; the doctors by their last. I see Betty / Dr. Mahmoud, Peter / Dr. Mulleins, Hannah / Dr. Mahmoud.

'Where's my room?'

'They probably don't have it set up yet; they'll have it after lunch for sure. Okay, so here's the shower-' He points to the right, to a door with a pink sliding plastic block on it between the words VACANT and OCCUPIED.

'When you're inside, you're supposed to put it to OCCUPIED, but people still don't pay any attention, and there's no lock on the door, so I like to keep close to the door. It's tough, 'because the water doesn't reach.'

'How do I make it say 'Occupied'? From inside?'

'No, here.' Joy slides the block. It covers up VACANT and only OCCUPIED appears.

'That's pretty cool.' I push it back. It's a simple system, but I wouldn't know if Joy hadn't shown me.

'Is there a guys' bathroom and a girls' bathroom?' 'It's not a bathroom, it's a shower. You have your bathroom in your room. But it's unisex, yeah. There's a shower in the other hall too 'we keep walking-' but I wouldn't use it. It bothers Solomon.' 'Who's Solomon?'

We come to the end of the hall. The windows have two panes of glass with blinds, somehow, between them.

Outside it's a cloud-spattered May Knox day. Chairs line the dead end. As we approach, a wilted little girl with blond hair and cuts on her face looks up from a pad of something and scurries into a nearby room.

'They show movies here sometimes.' Joy shrugs.

'Sometimes at the other end by the smoking lounge.'

'Uh-huh. Who was that?'

'the real Joy- they moved her in from the teen.'

We turn around.

'Medications are given out after breakfast, after lunch, and before bed.

We take them over there.' Joy points to a desk across from the dining room, where Smitty sits, pouring soda. 'That's the nurses' station; the other place is the nurses' office. All your lockers and stuff are behind the nurses' station.'

'They took my cell phone.'

'Yeah, they do that.'

'What about e-mail?'

'What?' We're back by the dining room. I slow my pace. Inside, the stocky bald man with squinty eyes who was frowning is speaking slowly and plaintively: '...Some people here who treat you like they have no respect for you as a human being, which I take personal offense to, and just because I went to my doctor and told him, 'I'm not afraid of dying; I'm only afraid of living, and I want to put a bayonet through my stomach, 'that doesn't mean I'm afraid of any of you.'

'Let's concentrate on our discussion of things that make us happy, Humble,' says the psychologist.

'And I know about psychologists when they're writing down what you're saying they're writing down how much money they're going to get when they sell their latest yacht because they're all yuppies with no respect...'

'C'mon,' Joy taps me.

'Is his name Humble?'

'Yeah. He's from Bensonhurst.' Bensonhurst is a particularly retro section of Knox, an Italian and Jewish neighborhood where a girl can walk down the street and have a car full of guys cruise up to her: Hey baby, you want to ride?

'Where are you from?' I ask.

'Sheepshead Bay.' That's another old- times Knox 'hood.

Russian. All these parts are far out.

'I'm from here,' I say.

'What, this neighborhood? This neighborhood is nice.' 'Yeah, I guess so.'

'Man, I'd give my one remaining ball to live here, I tell you that. I'm trying to get into a home around here, at the Y. Anyway, there's the phone.' He points to our left. There's a payphone with a yellow receiver. 'It's on until ten at night,' he says. 'The number to call back is written right on it, and it's on your sheet too, if you need people to call back. If someone calls for you, don't worry, someone find you.' Joy stops a second.

'That's it.'

It's very simple.

'What do we do here?' I ask. 'They have activities; a guy comes and plays guitar. Lacey comes in with arts and crafts. Other than that, you know, just take phone calls; try and get out, really.'

'How long do people stay?'

'Kid like you got money, got a family, you'll be out in a few days.'

I get the feeling I don't know how I know the rules of mental ward etiquette; maybe I was born with them; maybe I knew I'd end up here but I get the feeling that one big no-no in this place is asking people how they got here. I look at Joy's deep-sunk eyes.

It'd be a little like walking up to somebody in prison and going

'So? So? What's up, huh? Did-jah kill somebody? Did-ja?'

But I also get the impression that you can volunteer the reasons you got here at any Joy and no one will judge; no one will think you're too crazy or not crazy enough, and that's how you make friends. After all, what else is there to talk about? So, I tell Joy: 'I'm here because I suffer from serious depression.'

'Me too.' He nods. 'Since I was fifteen.' And his eyes shine with blackness and horror. We shake hands.

'Hey, Dariez!' Smitty says from his desk. 'We got your room ready; you want to meet your roommate?'

He looks about like what you'd expect for a guy named Joy: big; straight gray beard; wide, wrinkled dark face; glasses with white plastic rims. He doesn't have any clothes because he's in a dark blue robe, which smells intensely of body odor. Not that it's easy to notice any of this stuff at first, because when I go into the room, he's burrowed into bed.

Smitty flicks on the light. 'Joy! It's almost lunch! Wake up.

You have a new roommate!'

The first thing she said is...

'This young girl looked at me and said they're all named JOY here, it all just mental illnesses.'

'Mm?' He peers out from his sheets. 'Who is?' 'I'm Dariez,' I say, hands in my pockets.

'Mm, It is very cold here, Dariez. You did not like it.'

'Joy, weren't the men in here to fix the heat?'

'Yes, they fix yesterday, very cold. Fix today, tonight very cold.'

'It's spring, buddy; it doesn't get cold.'

'Mm.'

'Dariez, that's you over there.'

The bed in the far corner is made up for me if you can call it that. It's the sparsest bed I've ever seen: small and pale yellow with a sheet, a top sheet, and one pillow. No blanket, no stuffed animals, no drawers below, no patterns, no candles, no headboard. This reflects the style of the room, which has a window (encased blinds again,) a radiator under paneling, two beds, a table between the two beds with two funny-shaped hospital pitchers of water on top, lights, a closet, and a bathroom.

There aren't any patterns on the wall; only the ceiling has porous tiles that could be fun to look at. I check the closet. Joy has a tired pair of pants on the bottom shelf. The rest of the space is mine. I take off my hoodie and stuff it in there. 'Okay?' Smitty asks. 'Lunch in five minutes.' He leaves the door open. I sit down on my bed.

'Please close the door, please,' Joy says. I close it, come back. He looks right through me. 'Thank you.' 'What do we have for lunch?'

I ask.

'Hm.'

I'm not sure how to respond to that. I asked him a- question. 'Ah ... Is the food good?'

'Mm.'

'Ah... Where are you from?'

'Egypt,' he says in a clipped voice, and it's the first word I've heard him say that he sounds happy with. 'Where are you from?'

Your family?' 'White. German and Irish and Czech. A little Jewish, we think. But I'm Christian, I guess.'

That reminds me: in this sparse room, is it possible that the Gideons have placed a Bible? They put one in every motel in the world; they should have gotten to this place. I check the drawers, under the pitchers of water: nope. Out of range of the Gideons.

That's serious.

'Mm,' Joy says. 'What you look for? There is nothing.' He keeps staring.

I want to lie down, to get the sleep I couldn't get last night, but something about the way my roommate is lying there makes me want to leave, to walk around. Maybe it'll be good to be with someone like him, someone who seems worse off than me. I never really considered it, but there are people worse off than me, right? I mean, some people are homeless and can't get out of bed and are never going to be able to hold a job and, in Joy's case, have serious problems with temperature, all because their brains are broken. Compared to them I'm... well, I'm a spoiled rich kid.

Which is another something to feel bad about?

So, who's worse off?

I go out into the hall and almost bash headlong into one of the giant metal racks of trays. The rack gives off heat and smells of fresh cooked salty food and is being wheeled along by an attendant in a skullcap.

'Careful!' he yells at me.

Oh non. Now I have to eat. This will be the first time that they'll see how bad things are with me- I couldn't eat that egg downstairs and can't eat anything now. What if I get stressed and the man pulls his rope in my stomach and I throw up in the dining room? That'll be a fine entrance.

'Lunch!' the little man with the almost harelip calls down the hall. He pops out of the dining room, walks down to the far window and back, and knocks on everyone's door, even if they're awake and right in his face. 'Come on, Candace! Let's go, Bernie! C'mon, Kate! times to eat! Come on, Joy!'

'That's Armelio,' a voice says behind me. I turn; it's

Joy in his Martian sweatshirt. 'They call him the President. He runs the whole floor.' 'Hi, who're yah?' Armelio asks as he passes.

'Dariez.' I shake his hand.

'Great to meet you! All right! People! We have a new person here! Excellent, buddy! My new buddy. That's great! Time for lunch! Solomon, come out of your room, don't give any trouble, come and eat! Everybody's got to eat!'

I move into the dining room with Armelio bellowing and cast myself at a seat next to the bald man, Humble, who is still talking about psychologists and yachts.

'Come this way, we're going to take your vitals,' Smitty says, seating me in the small office. He takes my blood pressure off a rolling cart and my pulse with delicate fingers. He writes down on a sheet in front of him: 120 / 80.

'One-twenty-over-eighty, that's dead normal, isn't it?' I ask.

'Yeah.' Smitty smiles. 'But we prefer to live normal.' He wraps up the blood pressure gauge. 'Stay right here, we'll send a nurse in to talk to you.'

'A nurse? What are you?'

'I'm one of the day directors on the floor.'

'And what is this floor, exactly...?'

'It's a short-term facility for adult psychiatric.'

'So, like, a mental ward?'

'Not an award, a hospital. The nurse will answer any questions.'

He steps out of the office, leaving me with a form: name, address, Social Security number. Then-wait-

I've seen this before! It's the question from Dr. Jarnerny's office: Feeling that you are unable to cope with daily life. 1) Never, 2) Some days, 3) Nearly every day, 4) All the times.

What the hell, I'm in the hospital; I put 4's down the line there are about twenty prompts-except for the lines about self-mutilation, drinking, and drug use (I am not putting anything about pot, that's just the rule, told to me by Kristopher-you don't ever, ever admit to smoking pot, not to doctors, not to teachers, not to anyone in authority no matter how much you trust them; they can always report you to the FBI Pot-Smoking List.)

As I'm getting done, a squat black nurse with a kind wide smile and tightly braided hair steps in. She introduces herself with a thick West Indian accent. 'Dariez, I am Monica, a nurse on the floor here. I am going to ask you a couple of questions about what you're feeling and find out how to help you.'

'Yeah, uh... 'It's the joy of time to state my case. 'I came in because I was really freaked out, you know, and I checked in downstairs, but I wasn't sure where I was going, and now that

I'm here, I don't know if I really-'

'Hold on, honey, let me show you something.' Nurse Monica stands over me, although she's so short that we're almost the same height, and pulls out a photocopy of the form my mom signed downstairs only an hour before.

'You see that there? That signature says that you have been voluntarily admitted to psychiatric care at UMPC Hospital, yes?'

'Yeah...'

'And see? It says that you will be discharged at the discretion of the doctor once he has come up with your discharge plan.'

'I'm not getting out of here until a doctor lets me out!'

'Now, wait.' She sits. 'If you feel that this is not the place for you, after five days you can write a letter-we call it the Five-Day Letter-explaining why you feel that you do not belong here, and we will review that and allow you to leave if you qualify.' She smiles.

'So, I'm here for at least five days?'

'Somebody's people are just here for two. Not more than thirty.'

Ho-boy. Well, not much to say about it. That is my mom's signature. I sit back in my chair. This morning I was a pretty functional teenager. Now I'm a mental patient. But

you know, I wasn't that functional. Is that better? No, this is worse. This is a lot- 'Let's talk about how you came to be here,' Monica prompts.

I give her the rap.

'When was the last you were hospitalized?'

'Like, four years ago. I was in a sledding accident.'

'So, you've never been hospitalized for mental difficulties before.'

'Uh, nope.'

'Good... Now I want you to look at this chart. Do you see here?'

There's a little scale of 0-10 on a sheet in front of her. 'This is the chart of physical pain. I want you to tell me, right now, from a scale of zero to ten, are you experiencing any physical pain?'

I look closer at the sheet. Below the zero, it says no pain and below the ten it says unbearable excruciating pain. I have to bite my tongue.

'Zero,' I manage.

'All right, now, here's a very important question'-she leans in did you try to do anything to hurt yourself before you came here?'

I sense that this is an important question. It might be the kind of question that determines whether I get a normal room with a TV or a special room with straps.

'No,' I enunciate.

'You didn't take anything? You didn't try for the good sleep?'

'I'm sorry?'

'The good sleep, you know? That's what they call it. When you take many pills and drink alcohol and...' 'Ah, no,' I say. 'Well, that's good,' she says. 'We don't want to lose you. Think of your talents. Think of all the tools you have. From your hands to your feet.'

I do think about them. I think about my hands signing forms and my feet running, flexing up and down, as I sprint to some class I'm late for. I am good at certain things.

'So right- now we are getting ready for lunch,' Monica says.

'Are you a Christian?'

'Uh, yes.'

'Are you vegetarian?'

'No.'

'So, no specific diet restrictions, good. I need you to read these rules.' She drops four sheets of paper in front of me. 'They're about conduct on the floor.' My eye falls on 7...) Patients are expected to remain clean-shaven. Shaving will be supervised by an attendant every day after breakfast.

'I am not sure if you notice, but do you see what that first item is on the list?'

'Uh ... 'No cell phones on the floor?''

'That's right. Do you have one?'

I feel it in my pocket. I don't want to lose it. It's one of the only things that's making me right now. Without my cell phone, who will I be? I won't have any friends because I don't have their numbers memorized. I'll barely have a family since I don't know their cell phone numbers, just their home line. I'll be like an animal. 'Please give it here,' Monica says. 'We will keep it in your locker until your discharge, or you can have visitors take care of it.' I put it on the table.

'Please turn it off.'

I flip it open two new voicemails, who are they? ...And hold END. Bye-bye, little phone.

'Now, this is very important; do you have anything sharp on your person?'

'My keys?'

'Same as the phone. We keep those.'

I plop them in a heap on the table; Monica sweeps them into a tray like an airport security worker.

'Wonderful-do you have anything else you can think of?'

Monica, I'm down to my wallet and the clothes on my back. I shake my head.

'Great, now hold on.' She gets up. 'We're going to have Joy give you a tour.'

Monieec nods at me, keeps my charts, leaves me to review the papers, and goes into the hall. She returns a minute later with a gaunt, hollow man with big circles under his eyes and a nose that looks like it's been broken in about three places.

In contrast to floor policy, scruff lines his chin. He's older but still has all his hair, a stately gray mop, combed half-heartedly. And he carries himself a little weird, leaning back as if he were on a headrest.

'Jesus, you're a kid!' he says, curling his mouth. He reaches out a hand for me and his hand comes out sort of sideways, thumb crooked up.

'I'm Joy,' he says.

'That is not your name, it's here's, yet you can have it too.'

His sweatshirt has Marvin the Martian on it and says, WORLD DOMINATOR.

'Dariez.' I stand up.

He nods, and his Adam's apple, which has some extra gray whiskers on it, moves. 'You ready for the grand tour?'

Part: 10

Okay, so check it out. We're going to play a different game today.

All.

I ask you a question and you ask me a question.

Do we answer them?

It's up to you, but no matter what, you have to finish with a question.

- Here we go. Are you ready?

- Yeah- I said...

Finish with a question.

Are you stupid?

Uh, no... Are you?

There you go. Do you think I'm gross looking?

No. You look awesome.

What's your question?

Why'd you invited me here?

I thought it was nice that- you loaned Bobby your shirt.

Don't you think this is a good way to get to know someone?

Sure...

Have you played this before?

Not in here...

Are you a virgin?

So...

How long have you been here?

Nice transition, Craig.

Twenty-one days.

Who dragged you here?

I checked myself in, I guess.

Kind of, by accident.

The suicide hotline said to come.

Why are you here so long?

They think I might cut myself again.

Why'd you called the suicide hotline?

I guess...

Maybe I didn't want to kill myself.

But I kind of did.

Does that make sense?

So, where do you go?

Executive Pre-Professional.

You?

Delfin...

You're not some sort of school uniform perv, are you?

Do you guys wear uniforms?

I knew it.

Okay, sorry, I'm going to invade your personal space for one second.

Why?

- What are you doing?
- I'm just...
- Ow, you shocked me.
- Make a wish.
- Did to be with you...
- Aww, she rolled her eyes and fell into his arms.

Joy leads me into the bright hall with his odd gait.

'Everybody's in the dining room right now, sucking on winners' and food and crap that just tastes like terr-ed.'

He gestures as we go down the sideways hall, the one that branches off of the one I arrived at.

I look left- there's the dining room.

Its- its painted green, overlooked by a television, its old from like the 50's why they think this is still good we don't know, yet they say there more to live on the inside, then malting your brain down with cartoons, and- and like it's made of wood, yet again the year is 2020, get with the times.

There are full of circular tables... over there wavy... see- see them all there?

Like- like all detached from the hall by, that glass with the square wire mesh in it- and whatnot.

Private, yet over there at the tables have been- awl- pushed apart, and a panoply of people sit in a loose circle.

I can't even process them: they're the moteliest collection of young kids I've ever seen, all 13- 17.

I see that girl she is Rocks back and forth; I did not get why, and she was not saying anything to anyone.

A gigantic black girl rests her chin on a cane; a burned-out looking boy with long blond hair puts his hand through it; a stocky balding boy with slatted eyes scratches his armpit and frowns; an older girl with glasses mimes what appears to be an eagle, talking, before turning and inspecting the back of her chair.

The small boy I saw in the hall twitches his leg.

A girl with a streak of blue in her dark hair slumps over her chair like she's perceptibly more messed up than the others...

...A big girl with a wan frown leans back and twiddles her thumbs...

A black kid with wire-rim glasses sits perfectly still, and hey there's Jim from downstairs, showing yet another new girl around.

He's still got his stained shirt on, and he's looking up at the lights.

They must have processed him quickly because he's a return visitor.

You can tell whom the meeting leader is and that would-be Jim: a thin girl with now short dark hair, over the fact she cut in a day of going crayon herself- over a boyfriend.

Out of a dozen or so-o individuals, she's the only one in a suit- why he doesn't even know.

Some kids at UMPC aren't even in their clothes, other in the dress given for they don't have anything good to wear, but in white robes, some girls are in after bath time, like loose and V-necked at the top.

'Hey, boy,' Joy says, pulling me down the hall, you look cute in that thing, and show a little more than what aloud to me up top, showing some butt to yet that is just her, cute and crazy, yet moody.

She whispered I don't be underwire does that turn you on a little boy?

(Galp) he was all sheepish...

'If you're interested you can just sit in on the meeting... you can sit with me, she holds his hand.'

'um- she shushes him... saying don't be shy...'

'I'm doing the tour, so I can get out... your mine, I already said-

I want YOU, little boy!'

'Heh- a- a-okay.' He would not make eye contact with her, and her green eyes.

How old are you- he asked her- 'Fifteen?'

'Jesus! Me too- Okay, well, I see you after breakfast, after lunch, at three in the afternoon, after dinner, and you're my roommate, and before lights out, I am sure to read you a story and tuck you in- I like you.

(She was falling-)

'All right.' He said.

We come across a third hall, perpendicular to the one we're in... saying time to show you my room... hope you love it.

I see that Six North is shaped like an H: where you enter is at the bottom of the left leg...

The nurses' office is at the junction of the left leg, and the centerline; the dining room is at the intersection of the center line, and the right leg and the rooms line the left and right legs.

We're passing them now, going toward the top right of the H: they're simple doors with slots outside filled with slips of paper that say who's living in them and who their doctor is.

The patients are listed by their first names; the doctors by their last. I see Betty-Dr. Mahmoud, Peter Dr. Mullens, and -Dr. Mahjah.

And here too...

'Where's my room?'

'They probably don't have it set up yet; they'll have it after lunch for sure.

Okay, so here's the shower... if you look in there you see your little girlfriend all naked... said Jimi,' He points to the right, to a door with a rosy sliding plastic block on it between the words VACANT and OCCUPIED.

'When you're inside, you're supposed to put it to OCCUPIED, but kids still don't pay any attention, and there's no lock on the door, so-o I like-like to keep close to the door. It's tough because the water doesn't reach.'

'How do I make it say 'Occupied'? From inside?'

Why you afraid she walks in and sees your little pecker?

Um- he blushes...

'No, here.' Joy slides the block. It covers up VACANT and only OCCUPIED appears.

'That's pretty cool.'

I push it back. It's a simple system, but I wouldn't know if Joy hadn't shown me.

'Is there a boy's bathroom and a girls' bathroom?'

You have one in your room- no sex you're on camera- yet not in there...

You have your bathroom in your room. it's a shower- it just a crapper and sink- 'It's not much of a bathroom...

But it's unisex, yeah... like the room, she wanted to be with you so-o bad... they said okay... I think you would be good for each other...

There's a shower in the other hall too'-we keep walking- 'but I wouldn't use it. It bothers Solomon.'

'Who's Solomon?'

We come to the end of the hall. The windows have two panes of glass with blinds, somehow, between them.

Outside it's a cloud-spattered May Knox day.

Chairs line the dead end. As we approach, a wilted little girl with blond hair and cuts on her face looks up from a pad of something and scurries into a nearby room. 'They show movies here somebody's.'

Joy shrugs.

'Sometimes- at the other end by the smoking lounge.'

'Uh-huh. Who was that?'

'Joy. They moved her in from the teen.' We turn around.

'Medications are given out after breakfast, after lunch, and before bed. We take them over there.' Joy points to a desk across from the dining room, where Paullie sits, pouring soda.

'That's the nurses 'station; the other place is the nurses' office.

All your lockers and stuff are behind the nurses' station.'

'They took my cell phone.'

'Yeah, they do that.' 'What about e-mail?'

No.

'What?' We're back by the dining room.

I slow my pace. Inside, the stocky bald boy with squinty eyes who was frowning is speaking slowly and plaintively:

Some kids here who treat you like they have no respect for you as a hobby being, which I take personal offense to, and just for the reasons that, III- went to my doctor and told him...

'I'm not afraid of dying...

I'm only afraid of living, and I want to put a bayonet through my belly,' that doesn't mean I'm scared of any of you.'

'Let's concentrate on our discussion of things that make us happy, Self-effacing-and sweet,' says the psychologist.

'And I know about psychologists when they're writing down what you're saying they're writing down how much money they're going to get when they sell their latest yacht because they're all yuppies with no respect...'

'Come' on,' Joy taps me.

'Is his name Humble?'

'Yeah. He's from Bensonhurst.'

Bensonhurst is a particularly retro section of Knox, an Italian and Jewish neighborhood where a girl can walk down the street and have a car full of boys cruise up to her: Hey baby, you want to ride?

'Where are you from?' I ask.

'Sheepshead Bay.' That's another old- Knox 'hood.

Russian. All these parts are far out.

'I'm from here,' I say.

'What, this neighborhood? This neighborhood is nice.' 'Yeah,

I guess so.'

'Girl, I'd give my one remaining ball to live here, I tell you that. I'm trying to get into a home around here, at the- Y.

Anyway, there's the phone.'

He points to our left.

There's a payphone with a cream receiver.

'It's on until ten at night,' he says.

'The number to call back is written right on it, and it's on your sheet too, if you need kids to call back. If someone calls for you, don't worry, someone will find you.' Joy stops a second.

'That's it.'

It's very simple.

'What do we do here?' I ask.

'They have activities; a boy comes and plays guitar. Lacey comes in with arts and crafts. Other than that, you know, just take phone calls; try and get out, really.'

'How long do kids stay?'

'Kid like you got money, got a family, you'll be out in a few days.'

I look at Joy's deep-sunk eyes.

I get the feeling I don't know how I know the rules of mental ward etiquette; maybe I was born with them; maybe, I knew I'd end up here but I get the feeling that one big no-no in this place is asking kids how they got here.

It'd be a little like walking up to somebody in prison and going 'So? So? What's up, huh? Did-ja kill somebody?'

Did-ja?'

But I also get the impression that you can volunteer the reasons you got here at any time and no one will judge; no one will think you're too crazy or not crazy enough, and that's how you make friends. After all, what else is there to talk about? So, I tell Joy: 'I'm here because I suffer from serious depression.'

'Me too.' He nods. 'Since I was fifteen.' And his eyes shine with blackness and horror. We shake hands.

'Hey, Dariez!' Paullie says from his desk. 'We got your room ready; you want to meet your roommate?'

My roommate is Joy.

She looks about like what you'd expect for a girl named Glee, yet it is not polite to ask how someone identifies: big; straight gray beard; wide, wrinkled dark face; glasses with white plastic rims.

He doesn't have any clothes, apparently, senses he's in a dark blue robe, which smells intensely of body odor. Not that it's easy to notice any of this stuff at first, because when I go into the room, he's burrowed into bed.

Paullie flicks on the light. 'Joy! It's almost lunch! Wake up.'

You have a new roommate!'

'Mm?' He peers out from his sheets. 'Who is?' 'I'm Dariez,' I say, hands in my pockets.

'Mm, It is very cold here, Dariez. You do not like it.'

'Joy, weren't the men in here to fix the heat?'

'Yes, they fix yesterday, very cold. Fix today, tonight very cold.'

'It's spring, buddy; it doesn't get cold.'

'Mm.'

'Dariez, that's you over there.'

The bed in the far corner is made up for me if you can call it that. It's the sparsest bed I've ever seen: small and pale yellow with a sheet, a top sheet, and one pillow.

No blanket, no stuffed animals, no drawers below, no patterns, no candles, no headboard. It's just you and the girl you're with... nothing but getting to know someone... something you don't seem to know how to do, or they don't want to with you... right?

This reflects the style of the room, which has a window (encased blinds again,) a radiator under paneling, two beds, a table between the two beds with two funny-shaped hospital pitchers of water on top, lights, a closet, and a bathroom.

There aren't any patterns on the wall; only the ceiling has porous tiles that could be fun to look at. I check the closet.

Joy has a tired pair of pants on the bottom shelf. The rest of the space is mine. I take off my hoodie and stuff it in there.

'Okay?' Paullie asks. 'Lunch in five minutes.' He leaves the door open. I sit down on my bed.

'Please close the door, please,' Joy says. I close it, come back. He looks right through me. 'Thank you.' 'What do we have for lunch?'

I ask.

'Hm.'

I'm not sure how to respond to that. I asked him what question. 'Ah ... Is the food good?'

'Mm.'

'Ah... Where are you from?'

'Italy,' he says in a clipped voice, and it's the first word I've heard him say that he sounds happy with. 'Where are you from?'

Your family?'

'White. German and Irish and Czech. A little Jewish, we think.

But I'm Christian, I guess.'

That reminds me: in this sparse room, is it possible that the Gideons have placed a Bible?

They put one in every motel in the world; they should have gotten to this place. I check the drawers, under the pitchers of water: nope.

Out of range of the Gideon's. This is solemn.

'M-mm,' Joy says. 'What you look for? There is nothing.' He keeps staring.

I want to lay down, he was laying down with her she was in his arms- it was a cute crush- love...

They all knew... and was teasing the next day... to get the sleep I couldn't get last night, but something about the way my roommate is lying there makes me want to leave, to walk around.

Maybe it'll be good to be with somebody like him, someone who seems worse off than me. I never really considered it, but there are kids worse off than me, right?

I mean, some kids are homeless and can't get out of bed and are never going to be able to hold a job and, in Joy's case, have serious problems with temperature, all because- their brains are broken. Compared to them I'm... well, I'm a spoiled rich kid. Which is another something to feel bad about? So, who's worse off?

I go out into the hall and almost bash headlong into one of the giant metal racks of trays.

The rack gives off heat and smells of fresh cooked salty food and is being wheeled along by an attendant in a skullcap.

She jumped onto my bed and was cuddled up to me tightly.

'Careful!' He yells at me, saying they're looking... yet but this is what you need and what they want- a little boy.

Oh, no...

Now I have to eat...

This will be the first time- that they'll see how bad things are with me...

I couldn't eat that egg downstairs and can't eat anything now.

What if I get stressed and the boy pulls his rope in my stomach, and I throw up in the dining room?

That'll be a fine entrance.

'Lunch!' the little boy with the almost harelip calls down the hall. He pops out of the dining room, walks down to the far window and back, and knocks on everyone's door, even if they're awake and right in his face. 'Come on, Candace! Let's go, Bernie! C'mon, Kate! times to eat! Come on, Joy!'

'That's Armelio,' a voice says behind me. I turn; it's Joy in his Martian sweatshirt. 'They call him the President. He runs the whole floor.' 'Hi, who're Ya?' Armelio asks as he passes.

'Dariez.' I shake his hand.

All right! Kids! We have a new person here! 'Great to meet you!

Excellent, buddy! My new buddy. That's great! times for lunch!

Solomon, come out of your room, don't give any trouble, come and eat! Everybody's got to eat!'

I move into the dining room with Armelin bellowing and cast myself at a seat next to the bald boy, Humble, who is still talking about psychologists and yachts.

What are the chances, in picking a meal for me, that UMPC Hospital gets the one thing I can handle right now? Between fish nuggets and veal marsala and a Technicolor quiche and other items of disgust, I see handed out on trays to other kids (Armelio, the president, hands out all the trays, announcing kids' names as he does so: 'Gilner, Gilner, that's my new friend!')

I get curry-flavored chicken breast: it doesn't have real liquid curry, just a lovely infusion of yellow spices and a plastic knife and fork to cut it up. It also has broccoli...

Like- like... LIKE- the vegetable III like best, and herbed carrots on the side.

When I open the plastic lid...

...I just grin big, because, I know something has shifted in my stomach- not the Big Shift, but something concrete-and I am going to eat this.

(One week in)

That night she did the same thing with me sleeping with me, and we had slow sex...

But before I get ahead of myself- we need to say why-

(Back)

Anyways...

Besides the chicken and vegetables, the tray has coffee, hot water, a teabag, milk, sugar, salt, pepper, juice, yogurt, and a cookie.

It's as good-looking a meal as I can remember.

I start to slice the chicken. 'Does anyone have extra salt?' Humble, across my table, stretches his neck to the room. 'Here.' I split him off my salt packet. 'I would've hooked you up.'

'See, you didn't speak to me,' Humble says, pouring the salt on his chicken, looking at me through eyes surrounded by thin and purple-hued skin, as if he got punched in both a week ago.

'So-o like- um- yeah- naturally... I assumed you were one of those yuppies.'

'I'm not.' I put the chicken in my mouth.

It tastes okay and good... yet she is all I had my mind on...

'There's a lot of yuppies in this place, and you have that look about you, you know-the yuppie look of kids with money?'

'Yeah.'

'Kids who don't care about other kids. Unlike me..., see, I genuinely care about other kids. Does that mean that somebody won't be inclined to beat the hell out of somebody?'

No, but that's my environment. I'm like an animal.'

'We're all like animals,' I say. 'Especially now, when we're all in a room eating. It reminds me of high school.'

Like in Animal Farm, which I read, all animals are created equal, but some are more equal than others?

Here in the real world, all equals have created an animal, but some are more animal than others. Hold on, let me write that down.'

Humble reaches behind him to the one window in the dining room, which has board games stacked up under it.

He pulls Scrabble off the top of the stack, fishes out a pen from the box, removes the board, flips it over, and writes on the back of it, which is already covered with scribbling- 'You're smart, I see that.'

We're all animals, high school is animals, but some of us are more animal than others.

'Humble!' Paullie says from the door.

'Hey, hey, okay!' He throws his hands up. 'I didn't do it!'

'How boy-y do we have to tell you, no writing on the Scrabble board!'

Do you need a pencil and paper?' 'Whatever...' he says. 'It's all in here.' He points to his head, then turns back to me as if absolutely nothing had interrupted our conversation. 'Me and you, we might be equals, but I'm more animal.'

'Uh-huh.' I picked the right place to sit.

'I need to be the alpha male in any given situation.'

That's why as soon as I noticed you, I made a few judgments.

I saw that you were very young. Now in the wild, the lion who sees new youngsters from another pride, another breed, like he will kill and eat those youngsters, so he can breed his offspring. But here'-he gestures around as if you need to elucidate what 'here' is, as if you don't just take it for granted once you're inside' there, unfortunately, appears to be a distinct lack of women accepting of my breeding potential. So, in your youth, you are not a threat to me.'

'I see.' Across the room, he is trying to open his juice with one hand. The other hand stays at his side; I can't tell if he can't move it or just doesn't want to. Paullie comes over and helps him.

'It'll come to Ya!' He says.

'Do you feel that I'm a threat to you?' Humble asks.

'No, you seem like a pretty cool boy.' I munch.

Humble nods. His food, which was sitting on the plate in front of him, very innocent and oblivious, gets upset over the next twenty seconds as he eats half of it. I continue my slow and steady pace.

'When I was your age-you're fifteen, right?'

I nod, 'How'd you know?'

'I'm good with ages. When I was fifteen, I had this chick who was twenty-eight. I don't know why, but she loved me. Now, I was doing a lot of pot back then, my whole life was pot...'

It's weird how your stomach can come back around. As I tune Humble out, I eat not because I want to, not because I have to overcome anything, not to prove myself to anyone, but because it's there. I eat because that's what kids do. And somehow when the food is put in front of you by an institution, when there's a large gray force behind it and you don't have to thank anyone for it, you have the animal instinct to make it disappear before a rival like Humble comes along and snatches it away. I think as I chew, my problem might be too much thinking.

That's why you need to join the Army, soldier. I thought I was already in the Army, sir!

You're in the mental army, Gilner, not the US Army. So, I should join?

I don't know: can you handle it?

I don't know.

Well, you seem to know that you like order and discipline.

That's what the Army offers young men like you, Gilner, and that's what you're getting here. But I don't want to be in the Army; I want to be normal.

You've got some considering to do, then, soldier, because normal isn't no job as far as I'm concerned.

'Do you have a girlfriend?' Humble asks.

'What?'

'Do you? Somewhere out there. You got a hot little fifteen-year-old?' He points his food-colored fork at me.

'No!' I smile, thinking of Emmah.

'They got cute ones, though.' Humble runs his hand through hair that is no longer there. He has hairy dark arms with tattoos of jokers, swords, bulldogs, and pirate ships. 'They just keep making the girls cuter and cuter.' 'It's all the hormones,' I say.

'That's right. You're very smart. You got any sugar?'

I hand over a sugar packet. I've finished my chicken and I could eat more, frankly, but I don't know who to ask. Might as well make the tea. I open the teabag, which is labeled 'Sweet Ouch-Nee,' a brand I have never heard of and am not convinced exists, and stain my water with a bunch of deep dips. As I'm finishing up, Paullie approaches with the second tray of food, identical to the first.

'You look like you could handle some seconds,' he says.

'Thanks.'

'Eat up.'

I tackle the second chicken. I am a working machine. Part of me works that didn't before.

'The girls, they drink all this milk with cow hormones,' I say between bites, 'and they develop a lot younger.' 'You're telling me!' Humble says. 'The crazy thing is how the girls in my day were a lot better than my father's girls. I wonder what the next generation will be like.'

'Sex robots.'

'Heh. Where you from?'

'Around here.'

'This neighborhood? Nice. Must've been a quick ride.

If you came by ambulance. And I'm not assuming and I'm not judging. I'm just being curious.' He eats two gigantic bites of his food, chews, and continues, 'How did you get here?'

He's broken the rule of Six North. But maybe it's not a rule.

Or maybe eating with someone breaks it.

'I checked myself in.'

'You did? Why?'

'I was feeling pretty bad; I wanted to kill myself.'

'Buddy, that's what I told my doctor the other week. I told him, 'Doc, I'm not afraid of dying; I'm only afraid of living, and I want to put this bayonet through my stomach,' and then I stopped taking my blood pressure medication. Because I have high blood pressure on top of everything else, on top of the drugs they have me on here that keep me whacked out of my mind; if I don't eat lots of salt to regulate my blood pressure I'll die, so when I told him I wasn't taking my medication he said 'What, are you crazy? Are you trying to kill yourself?!

And I looked him right in the eyes and said, 'Yes.' And they carted me off here.'

'Huh.'

'The problem is I've been living in my car for the last year. I have nothing; I have the clothes on my back and that's it. The only thing I have is the car and now the car has

been towed and all my stuff is inside. There's thirty-five hundred dollars' worth of film equipment in there.'

'Wow.'

'So-o, over the next few days I have to call the police station, the tow yard, get myself into an adult home, and talk to my daughter. She's about your age. The mother I'm completely over but the daughter I love to death. The mother I'd like to love to death.'

'Heh.'

'Don't do me any favors; only laugh if it's funny.'

'It is!'

'Good. Because right now I don't have you pegged as a yuppie. You're something else. I'm not sure what you are, but I'm going to find out.'

'Cool.'

'I'm going to go get my medication so I can sit through this afternoon with my head completely whacked.'

Humble slides away...

I finish eating the chicken.

When it's done-clean plate-I feel better than I have about anything I've done in maybe a year.

This is all I need to do. Keith was hesitant at the Anxiety Management Center, but he was right-all you need is food, water, and shelter. And here I have all three. What next?

I look across the dining room, and three of the younger kids the big girl, the girl with dark hair and blue streak, and the blond girl with cuts-are all sitting together.

'C'mere.' Blue Streak beckons.

It's been a while since a bunch of girls asked me over to their table. First times.

'Me?' I point at myself.

'No, the other new boy,' Blue Streak says.

I'm not sure what to do with my tray. I get up, then turn back, then turn toward the girls, then swivel-

'On the cart,' Blue Streak says. She turns to the big girl. 'God, he's so cute.'

Did she just say that? I put my tray on the cart and sit in the vacant seat with the girls.

'What's your name?' Blue Streak asks.

'Ah, Dariez.'

'So-o, what's it like to be the hottest boy in here, Dariez?' My body hitches and jerks up as if on a pulley system. She's got it all wrong- she's the hot one. It's tough to tell whether her skin or teeth are the perfect white. Her eyes are dark and her lips pouty and open; the blue streak accents the contrast of hair and face, and she smiles at me- that's smiling. I don't know how I didn't notice her hotness before when I looked into the dining room. 'Jennifer,' the big girl says. She leans toward me. 'I'm Becca. Don't take advantage of Jennifer; she's a sex addict.' Jennifer smacks her lips: 'Shut up!' She turns back.

'I'm only here for one more day.' She slithers forward. 'You want to spend it with me?'

I think about what Humble would say. He would say Yeah, absolutely, because he's the alpha male. I try to develop and drop my words, keeping my voice deep and level: 'Yeah, absolutely.'

'Good,' she says, and there's a heat on my knee and a hand moving up my leg. She leans in. 'I think you're really hot.' The hand encloses my thigh. 'I have my private room because I'm so messed up, they won't let me sleep with anybody else.'

'You have your private room because you're a slut!' Becca corrects, and Jennifer kicks her.

'Ow-ah!'

Without warning, the blond girl with the cuts on her face gets up and speed-walks out of the room. I look through the window for her: nothing.

Jennifer says. 'She's no good for you.'

Then, sparking an out-of-body experience that truly makes me question whether I'm dreaming this, or have died and gone to some kind of awesome hell, she flicks her tongue around her lips in a perfect O-oo.

'Forget her, you have me now'

Something flashes out in the hall. The blond girl streaks to the window.

I can't be sure it's her. I mean, it is a her-it has breasts.

And- and- and- I think, yes, I think- II- I recognize her small body and wife-beater.

But- But I can't see her face because she presses up to a piece of paper against the glass:

BEWARE OF PENIS-

The sign slides down as if on an elevator. 'What are you looking at?' Jennifer asks, turning back. I eye her body as she swivels; from the waist up, she doesn't look like she has a penis. I keep my peripheral vision on the hall in case the messenger returns. 'Ha!' Becca is like. 'Joy did it to you again.' 'She what?' Jennifer stands. She has a round and female shape. Her legs are encased in jeans that have frills around her butt.

'I can't believe her ... hey.' She turns back. 'You are looking at my pants?'

'Yeah,' I gulped. I've lost all alpha maleness. Could I be like a theta male? They have to get lucky some Joy.

Being on top of the sexual food chain is a lot of pressure.

'I made them myself,' she says. 'I'm a fashion designer.'

'Wow? That's like a real job.' My mind spins; it's somehow fallen off the sex track into grade-school logic. 'I thought you were my age; how'd you learn how to design clothes-'

'All right,' Paullie strides in. 'Playtime is over. C'mon, Charles.'

'What the hell!' Jennifer jumps a few inches in the air and stomps her feet. Then, the horror of horrors, her voice drops two octaves. 'You boys won't let me have any fun!' It's a bad voice, even for a boy, like a frog croaking. Becca laughs and laughs, doubling over on herself, and all I can do is catch my breath and stare goggle-ly-eyed at Jennifer for signs. Ce n'est pas possible. She's flat, that's all. She has big hands; lots of girls have big hands. She doesn't have Adam's apple-oh, wait, she's wearing a turtleneck.

'C'mon, don't bother Dariez,' Paullie says.

'But he's so cute!'

'He's not cute, he's a hospital patient like you. You're supposed to get out tomorrow; don't jeopardize it. Have you taken your medicine yet?'

'Hormone treatments.' Beth / Charles winks at me.

'Come-mon, enough.'

Becca laughs, sighs. 'Oh, she got you good. I'm getting my meds.'

I look down at the table as they leave. I need some meds. I glance up and see patients lined up at the desk next to the phone, the nurses' station, eagerly passing the

joys of time in their little ways- President Armelio bopping from foot to foot, Joy-holding the hand that refuses to work-before getting pills in little plastic cups. Beth Charles and Becca eventually appear at the end of the line, chatting and gesticulating, and Beth / Charles blows me a kiss. I don't think I need to be in line behind them right now. Besides, all I take is Zoloft in the morning; if they wanted me on something midday, they would have told me.

When Becca and J / C are gone and I'm still sitting shell-shocked at the table, another sign appears at the window, this one inching up from below as if hoisted by spider threads:

DON'T WORRY. HE / SHE / IT GETS EVERYBODY, WELCOME TO SIX NORTH!

When I go out to find her, she isn't there. I ask the nurse wrapping up her dispensing duties if I need any meds, and she says I'm not scheduled for any. I ask her if I can have some. She asks what I need them for. I tell her, to deal with this crazy place. She says if they had pills for that, they wouldn't need places like this in the first place, would they?

'So, what's it like?' Mom asks, holding a tote bag of toiletries, with Dad and Sarah next to her. We're at the end of the right H leg, me in one chair facing the three of them. Visiting hours are from 12 to 8 on Saturday.

Sarah doesn't let me answer.

'It's like One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest!' she says, excited. She's dressed up in jeans and a fake suede jacket for Six North. 'I mean, all these kids look like... serious crazies!'

'Sh-h,' I tell her. 'Joy's right there.' Joy is behind her at the window, sitting with his arms crossed as usual, out of his shirt and into a clean navy robe.

'Who's Joy?' Mom asks eagerly.

'The boy I came in with downstairs. I think he's schizophrenic.'

'Doesn't that mean he has two personalities?' Sarah asks, turning. 'Like, he's not just playing; she's also Molly or something.'

'No, you'd be surprised, that's a different one,' I raise my eyebrows. 'Joy's just a little... scattered.' Joy sees me looking at him and smiles. 'I tell you, you play those numbers, it'll come to yah!' he chirps.

'I think he's talking about Lotto numbers,' I explain. 'I've been trying to figure it out.'

'Oh my gosh.' My sister covers her face.

'No, Sarah, don't do that, watch,' Mom says. She turns around. 'Thank you very much, Joy.'

'I tell you: it the truth!'

'I like this place,' Mom turns back. 'I think it's full of good kids.'

'I like it.' Dad leans in. 'When can I join?' But when no one laughs, he leans back, clasps his hands, sighs.

'Is that a transvestite?' Sarah asks. J / C is down the hall, like forty feet away, and I don't know for the life of me how Sarah suspects something out there that I couldn't see at the point-blank range.

'No, now listen-'

'Is it?' Dad squints.

'Boys!'

Look here, this wall here tells about the story of a girl Named- Haven, look!

'Transvestite!' Joy shrieks. He does it at top range-I haven't heard him that loud before. The entire hall, which admittedly is just me, my family, J / C, and the older professor-type girl with the glasses, stops and stare's.

'I tell you once, it'll come: it comes to Ya!'

J / C starts walking toward us. 'Are we talking about me?' he asks in his boy's voice.

He waves at me.

'Hey, Joy.' He comes right up between me and my sister.

'Dariez, your name is, right?' 'Yeah,' I mumble.

'Wow, is this your family?'

'Yeah.' I tip my palm at each of them-it's at the level of the frills on his pants. 'My dad'-he juts' his lip out-' my mom' -she nods, all smiles-' and my sister, Sarah'-she reaches out a hand.

'Oh my God, so lovely!' J / C says. 'I'm Charles.' He shakes with everyone. 'They're going to take really good care of your son here. He's a good boy.'

'How about you; what are you in for?' Dad asks. I kick him.

Doesn't he know what not to ask?

He addresses Dad: 'I have bipolar, sir, and I had an episode, and they brought me here. I'm going back upstate today.'

But the doctors are very attentive here, and the turnaround times are great.' 'Wonderful,' Mom says.

'It's okay, Dariez!' J / C touches my shoulder. 'My gosh, did you just kick your dad? I never even did that.'

I look at them: my safe environment. I frankly wouldn't be surprised to find any of them in Six North. 'Well, I'll leave you, boys, to your afternoon,' J / C says. He walks away- 'Of course'-J / C gestures to us-' it's a lot better when you have family support. They want to make sure they discharge you into a safe environment. I don't have that.' He shakes his head. 'Dariez, you're very lucky.' slowly.

Joy makes an indecipherable high-pitched whining noise.

'That's applause, isn't it?' Dad asks, throwing a thumb behind him. 'I like that.'

'Those are awesome pants,' Sarah says.

'Okay, so let's get down to business, Dariez,' Mom is like.

'What do you need?'

'I need a phone card. I need you, boys, to take my phone and leave it plugged in so the calls register. I need some clothes, like what you were brought before, Mom. I don't need towels; they have those. Magazines would be good. And a pencil and paper, that would rock.' 'Simple enough. What kind of magazines?'

'Science magazines! He loves those,' Dad says.

'He might not be up for science magazines right now,' Mom answers. 'Do you want anything lighter?' 'Do you want Star?' Sarah asks.

'Sarah, why would I want Star?'

'Because it's awesome.' She reaches into her purse- her first one, black, a recent Mom purchase-and unrolls a glossy pink monstrosity, complete with pictures of the most recent spectacular outing of a celebrity breast in public.

I hold it up for Joy.

'Mm-hmm! 'He says. 'I tell you! I tell you! It comes to Ya!'

'That's very nice,' says the professor girl with bugged-out eyes, who I somehow didn't realize had migrated right behind me.

'Oh, excuse me,' she looks up. 'I wasn't listening to your conversation at all.' She walks to her room.

'Um... 'Sarah says.

'I'll take it,' I say. I put it under my seat. 'I think the floor will enjoy it.'

'Is it just me, or are you starting to develop a sort of allegiance to the tribe?' Dad asks.

'Sh-h I smile.

'Dariez, the next order of business: have you called Dr.

Jarnerny?'

'No.'

'Have you called Dr. Ross?'

'No.'

'Well, they both need to know where you are, for health insurance reasons and because they're your doctors and take care of you, and that's going to be very important to them.'

'Your numbers are in my phone.'

'Well, let's call them; we picked up your phone from the front,' Mom reaches into her pocket.

'No!' Dad grabs her hands. 'Don't take out the phone!'

'Don't be ridiculous, honey. Dariez is the one who shouldn't have it, not us.'

'Well, uh, I don't think we want to get our son into trouble. That's not the kind of place you want to be sent on a break.'

I look at him. 'That's not so funny.'

'What? Oh, I'm sorry,' he says.

'No, Dad, seriously. It isn't... I mean, it's serious business.'

'I'm just trying to lighten the mood, Dariez-'

'Well, that's what you always try. Let's just not do it here.'

Dad nods, looks me dead in the eyes; Slowly and regretfully, he banishes all the smiles and jokes from his face, and for once he is just my father watching his son who has fallen so low. 'All right, then.' We stay calm.

'Is that the truth, joy?' I ask without looking at him.

'It's the truth, and it comes to yah!' I smile.

'We'll take care of the phone later,' Dad sums up.

'Next work plan?' Ask Mom.

'How long will I be in here, I think.'

'How long do you think?'

'A few days. But I haven't seen the doctor yet. Dr. Mahmoud.'

'Right, how is he? Is he good?'

'I don't know, Mom. You've met him as long as I have. He'll be doing the rounds soon, and I'll talk to him.'

'I think you have to stay here until you get better, Dariez. You don't want to get out early and you have to come back; This is how you get 'into the system'.

'Right. I won't. I think that's a big part of places like this: they make them, so you don't want to come back.

'What's the food like?' Sarah asks.

'Oh, I almost forgot,' I look at my family. I know I shouldn't be proud of it; It's really sad that this is my big achievement of the day... but I ate everything at lunch.'

'Did you?' Mom gets up, pulls me up and hugs me.

'Yes.' I retire. 'It was a chicken. I ate two portions of it.'

'Girl, that's a big one,' Dad gets up and shakes my hand.

'No, it's not, it's really easy, everyone does it, but for me it's like a stupid triumph-

'No,' Mom says, looking me in the eye. 'What is a triumph is that you woke up this morning and decided to live. This is a triumph. That's what you did today.' I nod to her. As I said, I'm not a screamer.

'Yes, because if you had died...' Sarah says, 'That would have been.' She rolls her eyes and hugs my leg.

I sit down again. 'Once the food is in front of you, it's just that you're eating. I mean, they're professionals here; They know how to take children with them and put them in a routine that gives them something to do.'

'That's right,' says Mom. 'So, what do you do now?'

'I think there are activities-'

'Hey, Dariez, is this your family?' President Armelio enters the stage. His half harelip and hair shock my sister, but his relentless enthusiasm for simple – I don't know-life – would beat the fear out of anyone.

He shakes hands and says, we are a beautiful family and I am a good boy, he notices.

'Dariez is my buddy! Hey, buddy, do you want to play cards?'

President Armelio holds up a deck of cards as if he had just fished it out of the sea.

'Yes, absolutely!' I say. I get up. When was the last time I played cards? Before the test, probably before high school.

'All right!' Armelio says. 'My kind of boy! Let's do it. I searched and searched: No one here likes to play cards like me! What do you want to play? Spades? I'll crush you, buddy; I will crush you.'

I look at my parents. 'We'll call you,' Mom says. 'And hey, what about sleeping?'

'I'm wired right now,' I say. 'But I'm going to crash. I'm starting to get a headache.'

'Headache? Buddy, as soon as I crush you into spades, you're going to have a much bigger headache!' Armelio makes his way to the dining room to set up the cards.

'You see,' Sarah says, hugging me.

'Bye, my sweet girl.' Dad shakes my hand.

'I love you,' Mom says. 'I'll call you with the doctors' phone numbers.'

'And bring a phone card.'

'And I bring a phone card. You'll stay tuned, Dariez.' 'Yes, I will.' And once they're around the bend, I go to the dining room and learn how to play spades for the rest of the afternoon, which Armelio crushes me.

Part: 11

I'm afraid to talk on the phone. The phone on Six North is a hustle and bustle, with Joy and the blond burnt-out guy I learn is called Joy taking calls from, I assume, their respective female colleagues. Joy happily starts her calls and says...

When she answers, she always says 'Jack's Pub' and then finds whoever the call is for. 'Baby' often, but then he gets angry and slams the phone shut and says 'bitch'; Paullie tells him not to do that; Joy leans back with a particularly strong aura of non-care.

Five minutes later, another call comes for him, and he is back at 'Baby'. However, he doesn't even answer the phone; President Armelio has this task.

Children on the outside world don't know what happened to me, I'm in a kind of stasis right now. Things are under control. But the dam will break. Even if I'm only here until Monday, the rumors will fly and the homework will pile up.

In a rare moment when Joy and the girl I call Nevaeh, I don't remember her name, leave the phone open, I go to it with the phone card that mom brought me twenty minutes after her departure

Dad and Sarah. I pick up and hear the dialing tone, dial the 800 number for the calling card... and then stop. I can't do it.

I just don't want to deal with it.

'Where is Dariez?'

'She's sick.'

'She's not sick, she has alcohol poisoning because he can't handle real alcohol.'

'I heard she took someone's pills and freaked out.'

'I heard she realized she's gay and he's dealing with it.'

'I've heard her parents send her to another school.'

'She couldn't handle it here anyway.'

'She was always such a loser.'

'She's freaking out in front of her computer.'

'She can't move or anything. It is catatonic.'

'She woke up thinking she was a horse, one day — she's crazy.'

(It was said from the side of her mouth.)

Well, whatever, what's question three?

There were two messages on my phone when I walked in, and now there are probably more, each requiring a callback, and the callback may have required another tentacle callback – which took me right back to where I was last night. I can't go there, so I'll wait. I can wait five minutes.

But then Joy is at stake. And then I wait another five minutes. And the news is piling up. And that doesn't even count emails. What hellish assignments did my teachers send by email?

'Excuse me, are you using the phone?' asks the giant black girl with the stick as I stare at her.

'Yes, uh.' I pick up the phone. 'Yes. Yes, I am.' 'Okay.' She smiles, rolls her gums and shows no teeth. I start dialing, enter my PIN, enter my number.

'Please enter your password and then press the pound sign.'

I obey.

'They have three new messages.' One more than before. Not so bad.

'First new message: Message marked as urgent.' Uh-oh.

'Hey, Dariez, it's Emmah, me just, um... We talked, and you sounded really bad. I just wanted to make sure you're doing everything right, and since you're not answering - it's like two in the morning, I mean, why should you answer? -But I'm kind of worried that maybe you did something stupid because of me. Don't. I mean, it's cute, but don't. Okay, that's it, I'm with Kristopher, he's a total dick. Bye.'

'To delete this message-'

I met 7.

'Next message.'

'Dariez, it's Kristopher, call me back? Let's chill-' I hit 7-7.

'Next message.' 'Hi, Mr. Gilner, this is your science teacher, Mr. Reynolds. I got your phone number from the student directory. We need to talk about the lack of your labs; I miss five of them-' 7-7.

'End of news.'

I put the phone away as if it were a dangerous animal. I pick up again, call home. I can't stop now.

'Sarah, can you get Emmah and Kristopher's phone numbers out of my cell? And check out Knox's recent missed calls; I need to call my science teacher.' 'Sure. What does it look like over there?'

I look to the left. A Hasidic Jewish boy, complete with white pants, yarmulke, tassels hanging from him, braided hair and sandals, hurries down the hallway towards me. Shreds of red food litter his dark beard, and his eyes are wild and confused. He says to me, 'I am Solomon.'

'Um, I heard about you. I'm Dariez, but I'm on the phone.' I cup the recipient.

'I ask you to keep it quiet! I'm trying to rest!' He turns around and races away, holding his pants.

'O-ooh! Solomon introduced himself to you!' cries the girl with the stick. That's big.' 'It's normal,' I say to my sister.

'Okay, here.' She gives me Emmah's and Kristopher's and the teacher's numbers; I write them down on a piece of paper that Paullie gave me. I should have known that beforehand. Emmah looks well written - healthy and useful. Science teachers look jagged and hateful. Maybe I won't be able to call him until tomorrow.

'Thank you, Sarah-bye.'

I hang up and look at the lady with the stick.

'Hey, I'm Dariez,' I say.

'Ebony.' She nods. We shake hands.

'Ebony, it's cool if I just make one more call?'

'Of course.'

I dial 800, enter my PIN, dial Emmah.

'Hello?'

'Hey, Emmah, it's me.'

'Dariez, where are you?'

It's funny how kids ask that as soon as they get you on the phone. I think it's a byproduct of cell phones: kids — especially girls and moms — want to pin you into physical space. The fact is that you could be anywhere on a cell phone and it shouldn't matter where you are. But it will be the first thing children ask.

'I'm with a friend. In Knox.'

I also wonder how ~Sped~ lies cell phones contributed to the world.

'Uh-huh, Dariez. I don't think so.'

'What do you mean?' I wipe the sweat from my forehead. The sweat starts again. This is not good. I was sweating in the emergency room, but I wasn't sweating at lunch.

'You're not with a friend. You're probably with a girl.'

I look at Ebony. She smiles and leans forward on her cane.

'Yes, absolutely.'

'I know you. Last night you had me on the phone; Tonight you're out with a girl.'

'Sure, Emmah-'

'Seriously, how are you? Thank you for your callback. I was worried.'

'I know I got your message.'

'I don't want you to freak out about me. I think you just need some time to decompress a little bit and don't think about me and think about someone else. Because I know we might be good for each other, but I'm with someone else, you know?'

'Right... um... I didn't freak out about you last night.'

'No?'

'No, I'm freaked out about much bigger things. I had a kind of crisis and wanted to reach someone who understood it.'

'But you asked me if we could ever have been together.'

'Well, I tried to clarify this because yah' know ... I wanted to do something stupid.'

She lowers her voice: 'Kill yourself?'

'And.'

'You wanted to kill yourself because of me?'

'No!' I shudder. 'I was just in a really bad place, and you were a part of it because you're a part of my life, just like Kristopher is a part of it and my family is a part of it, but I thought you could sort something out for me before I...'

'Dariez, I'm so flattered.'

'No, you have the wrong idea. Don't be flattered.'

'How could I not be? I've never had a boy who wanted to kill himself for me. It's like the robot thing.'

'Emmah, it wasn't about you.'

'Are you sure?'

I look down, and the answer is right there in my chest and it bounces back. 'Yes. I have bigger problems than you.' 'Ah, okay.'

'And you shouldn't assume that everything revolves around you.'

'Whatever. What's wrong with you?'

'Nothing. Now everything is actually much better.'

'You're acting like a total dick. Do you want to come out tonight?'

'I can't.'

'Did Kristopher call you? We're having a big party at his house.'

'Right. I probably won't celebrate for... like... awhile. As always, maybe.'

'Is everything alright now?'

'Yes, I'm just... I'm in the process of figuring out a few things.'

'At your friend's house.'

'Right.'

'Are you like in a crack cave or something?'

'No!' I shout, and just then President Armelio comes up to me:

'Hey, buddy, you want to play spades? I will crush you.'

'Not now, Armelio.'

'Who is this?' Emmah asks.

'Leave him alone, he'll talk to his girlfriend.' Ebony knocks on Armelio with her stick.

'She's not my friend,' I whisper to her.

'Who is this?'

'My friend Armelio.'

'No, the girl.'

'My friend Ebony.'

'Where are you, Dariez?'

'I have to go.'

'All right...' Emmah grimaces her voice. 'I'm glad you do... uh... better.' 'I feel much better,' I say.

It's done, I think. She's done, and you're done with her.

'You see, Dariez.' I hang up.

'I think that's over,' I say to myself.

Then I decide to announce it to the Chamber: 'I think this is over!' Ebony stomps her stick and Armelio claps.

Something deep in my guts, under my heart, has shifted to the left and settled in a more comfortable place. It's not the shift, but it's a shift. I imagine Emmah with her beautiful face and her little body and black hair and pouting lips and Kristopher's hands everywhere, but also with her smoking weed and the pimples on her forehead and making fun of children all the joy and the way she is always so proud of how she is dressed. And I imagine it fading.

I play cards with Armelio in the dining room until Joy sticks her head in as always:

'Dariez? At your door does it say that Dr. Mahmoud is your doctor? He makes his rounds.'

Continued: 1

Joy-

'I don't want to be here,' I tell him at the entrance of my room, where I catch him before he visits Joy.

'I don't think it's the right place for me.'

'Of course not,' nods Dr. Mahmoud. He's wearing the same suit he had earlier in the day, though that feels like last year. 'If you had liked it here, that would be a very bad prognosis!'

'Right.' I laugh. 'Well, I mean, everyone is friendly, but I feel much better and I think I'm ready to go. Maybe on Monday? I don't want to miss school.'

Besides, Doc, right now the phone messages and emails are piling up and the rumors are flying. I just talked to this girl and I did, okay — but the tentacles are curled up and the pressure is mounting, preparing to pounce on me when I leave. If I'm in here too long, I have so much more to do when I get out.

'We can't rush it,' says Dr. Mahmoud. 'The important thing is to get better. If you try to leave too early - suddenly, is everything better? ... We doctors become suspicious.'

'Oh. Well, you don't want the doctor who can dismiss you from the psychiatric hospital to become suspicious.' 'Right. Right now you look much better to me, but maybe that's a wrong recovery.'

'A fake shift.'

'I'm sorry?'

'A fake shift. That's what I call it. If you think you beat it, but you didn't?' 'Exactly... We don't want that.'

'So, I'll be here until I have the right shift?'

'I don't follow.'

'I will stay here until I am healed?'

'Life is not cured, Mr. Gilner.' Dr. Mahmoud leans in. 'Life has travelled.'

'Okay.'

I'm not as impressed by it as he would like. He arches back: 'We will not keep you here until you are healed of anything; We'll keep you here until you're stable – we call it 'baseline fixing.' 'Okay, when will my baseline be set?'

'Five days, probably.'

One, two, three... 'Thursday? I can't wait until Thursday, doctor. I have too much school. That's four days of school. If I miss four days, I'm so behind.

Plus, my friends... '

'And?'

'My friends will know where I am!'

'Aha. Is that a problem?'

'And!'

'Why?'

'Because I'm here!' I gestured into the hall. Solomon shuffles by very quickly in his sandals and tells someone to be quiet, he tries to rest. 'Mr. Gilner.' Dr. Mahmoud puts a hand on my shoulder. 'They have a chemical imbalance, that's all. If you were diabetic, would you be ashamed of where you were?'

'No, but-'

'If you had to take insulin and quit and were taken to the hospital, wouldn't that make sense?'

'That's different.'

'How?'

I sigh. 'I don't know how much of it is chemical. Sometimes I just think depression is a way to cope with the world. For example, some children get drunk, some children take drugs, some children become depressed. Because there's so much stuff out there that you have to do something to deal with it.'

'Ah. That's why you need to be here longer to talk about these things,' says Dr. Mahmoud. 'You have a psychologist, right?'

Did you call your psychologist?'

Shoot. I knew I was forgetting something.

'You have to call; Your psychologist will come here to meet with you. What's her name? Or his?'

'Dr. Ross.'

'Oh!' says Dr. Mahmoud; His lips curl into a distant smile. 'Wonderful. Get Andrea down here.' 'Andrea?' I never knew her first name. She keeps it a secret. It is obscured in all their degrees. She says it's part of politics.

He waves his hand. 'Make an appointment with her; Then we are so much closer to creating your treatment plan and getting you out of here as quickly as possible. We'll try for Thursday.'

'Not before Thursday.'

'No.'

'Thursday,' I mumble to myself and look up across the room.

Joy is more susceptible lump. 'Five days, that's it! Everything will be fine, Mr. Gilner. Your life will wait. You simply participate in the group activities and call Dr. Ross. And if you're rich and successful, don't forget me, okay?'

'Okay.'

'Can you please close the door?' Ask Joy from his bed.

'Joy, you're next: how come you're always asleep - sleep - sleep?'

Dr. Mahmoud walks past me. I call Mom to report the news, and then I call Dr. Ross. She says she's sorry I took this turn for the worse, but it's always two steps forward, one step back.

'If that's my only step back,' I tell her, 'what do I do next: win the lottery and get my TV show?'

That would be a good TV show, I think. A boy wins the lottery in the psychiatric hospital.

Dr. Ross can't come tomorrow because it's Sunday, but she says she'll be there on Monday. I'm surprised by the distinction at the moment. In Six North, there probably won't be much different.

'They say there's going to be a pizza party tonight,' Humble tells me over dinner. Dinner consists of chicken tenders with potatoes and salad and a pear. I eat everything. 'But that's what they say every night.' 'What's a pizza party?'

'We all put in the money and get pizza from the neighborhood. It's tough because no one ever has cash. It's like a big deal when we get hot peppers.'

'I have eight dollars.'

'Sh-h. Don't announce it!' He stops chewing. 'The kids in here have no money. I don't have two cents to rub against each other.' I nod. 'I've never heard that before.'

'No? Do you like it?'

'And.'

'How about: I don't have a pot to piss in or a window to throw it out of.'

'No.'

'What is: I have Jack and shit and Jack has left town.' 'Heh. No!

Where do you get them all?'

'From the old neighborhood. Gim-me a ring.

Catch Ya on the other side. It's the best way to talk.'

'A ring, what's that call?'

'Don't ask yuppie questions.'

Humble scans the room for children they can talk about. He enjoys talking about other children - he just enjoys talking, I've discovered, but he especially enjoys talking about other children, and when he does, he puts on a peculiar kind of voice that is not quite a whisper, but so deeply monotonous that no one notices. He also seems to be able to throw it, so it feels like he's talking into my left ear.

'So-o, I suppose you've familiarized yourself with our dear clientele here on the floor. President Armelio is the president.' He nods over to Armelio, who has first used up his food and gets up to return the tray. 'Do you see how fast he eats? If you could use a quarter of its energy, you could power Knox Island. I'm not kidding. He should work in a place with children like us. He has such a good heart and he is never down.'

'Then why is he in here?'

'He's psychotic, of course. You should have seen him when they brought him in. He shouted his head over his mother. He is Greek.'

'Hm.'

'Now there's Ebony, she from. This is the biggest I've ever seen. I don't even get up, but if you were a man, you could lose yourself in it.

It's like having your own church. I think that's why she needs the stick. She is also the only girl I have ever known who wears velvet trousers; I think you have to have such a butt to wear velvet pants.

They just make them extra-extra-extra-big.'

'I didn't even notice them.'

'Well, give him a while. After a few days you start to notice children's clothes because they all wear the same stuff every day.'

'It won't get dirty?'

'They do laundry on Tuesdays and Fridays. Who gave you your tour when you walked in?'

'Joy!'

'He should have told you that.' Humbly turns his head and then turns around. 'Now Joy and that girl too' - they sit together at a table like they were at lunch - these two were some of the biggest methamphetamine addicts in Clarion, period, in the nineties. They were called Fiend One and Fiend Two. The party didn't start until they showed up.'

That must have been such a feeling, despite all the drugs, I think. Coming into a house and kids getting up and greeting you: 'All right, boy!' 'You're here!' 'What's wrong?' That was probably just as addictive as the amphetamines. Kids kind of do that with Kristopher.

'What happened to them?' I ask.

'What happens to anyone? They were burned out, lost all their money, ended up here. Have no families, no women-well,

I think Joy has one.'

'He's on the phone.'

'You can't tell that. Children pretend to be on the phone all the time. Like them' - he tilts his head to the girl with the bedbug eyes who was standing behind me when I was talking to my family - 'The professor. I caught her talking to Dr. Dial Tone on the phone. She is a university professor. She ended up here because she believes someone tried to spray her apartment with insecticide. She has newspaper clippings about it and everything.'

Humbly turns around: 'The black child with the glasses: He looks pretty normal, but he has it bad. You can tell he doesn't come out of his room often. That's because he's afraid gravity will reverse and he will fall into the ceiling. When he goes outside, he needs to be near trees so that in case gravity stops, he has something to hold on to. I think he's about seventeen. Did you talk to him?'

'No.'

'He doesn't talk. I don't know how much they can do for him.'

The boy looks at the ceiling fan above the dining room, shudders and puts food in his mouth. 'Then there's my joy.

My-a Joy has been here many times. I've been here for twenty-four days, and I've seen him come and go twice. You seem to like him.'

'We came in together.'

'He's a cool boy. And he has good teeth.'

'Yes, I noticed that.'

'Pearl white. Not many kids here have that. I wonder what happened to Ebony's teeth.' 'What's wrong with them?' I turn around.

'Don't look. She doesn't have one, you didn't notice? She is on a liquid diet. Only gums. I wonder if she sold them, tooth by tooth...'

I bite my tongue. I can't help it. I shouldn't laugh at any of these kids, and neither should Humble, but maybe it's okay, somewhere, somehow, because we enjoy life? I'm not sure. Um-a, two tables away, notices my suppressed laughter, smiles at me and laughs himself.

'I said-jah: It's coming to yah!'

'Let's go. What's going on in his head?' Humbly asks.

I can't help it. It's too much. I break down. Juice and chicken-tender pieces spray my plate.

'Oh, I've got you now,' Humble continues. 'And here comes the guest of honor: Solomon.'

The Hasidic Jewish boy comes in and holds up his pants. He still has food in his beard. He grabs his tray and opens a microwave pack of spaghetti and begins to shovel it into his mouth, slurping, moaning swallowing.

'This boy eats once a day, but it's like his last day on earth,' Humble says. 'I think he's the furthest away of them all. He has like a direct audience with God.'

Solomon looks up, turns his head from side to side, and resumes eating.

Humbly falls to a true whisper. 'He made a few hundred pills of acid and blew out his pupils. His eyeballs are probably dilated.'

'No way.'

'Absolutely. It is a certain cult of the Hasidics: the Jewish acid heads. There is a portion of their scriptures that tell them that it is the way to talk to God. But he took it too far.'

Solomon gets up, leaves his tray at the table in disgust, and leaves the room with alarming speed.

'He's like the mole boy, back into his hole,' Humble says. 'The real mole children are the anorexics; You don't even see them.'

'How ~Sped~ kids are in here?' I ask.

'They say twenty-five,' Humble says. 'But that's not counting the stowaways.'

I look around. Charles/Beth is not in the room.

'Did he, uh, you knew it, Charles? Has he gone?' 'Yes, the tranny is gone. I left this afternoon. Tranny met you?'

'And.'

'Paullie lets him do that. Get a kick out of it.'

'I can't believe he's just gone. They don't throw a party for you when you leave?'

'No way. Children here don't want to get out. Getting out means going back to the streets or jail or trying to fish their stuff out of a confiscated car, like me. Your kind of situation, with the parents and a house: that's rare. And with so ~Sped~ kids coming and going, we'd be crazy to try a party every time. We would end up like Fiend One and Fiend Two.'

My tray is a mess of food splashing out. 'You're ruining me, humble,' I tell him.

'I know. I'm a great time for everyone. It's a shame I'm in here instead of getting paid for it on stage.'

'Why don't you try to go on stage?'

'I'm old.'

'I need to get some napkins.' I get up and go to Paullie, who hands me a stack. I return, wipe my tray and start with the bulb.

'They have a secret admirer,' Humble says. 'I should have guessed it. I know how you work.'

'Was?'

'She was just here. Look at your chair.'

I get up and check it. There is a piece of paper, face down. I turn it around and it says HOPE YOU HAVE A GOOD TIME. VISITING HOURS ARE TOMORROW FROM 19:00-19:05 I DON'T SMOKE.

'See? Your little girl with the face of the cut-up just left it.' Humbly stands up. 'I had a feeling. Now you're starting to look like a rival man. Maybe I need to keep an eye on you.'

He puts down his tray and queues for his medication. I fold up the paper and put it in the pocket where my phone used to be.

'Dariez! Hey buddy! Phone!'

I sit with Humble in front of the smoking lounge for the 10 p.m. cigarette break and think about where I was at 10 p.m.: just getting into mom's bed. Humble doesn't smoke, says it's disgusting, but everyone else here does it practically, including the black boy who is afraid of gravity and the big girl.

Becca, both of whom I thought were minors. Armelio, Ebony,

Joy, joy, joy... No matter how crazy they all seem, they have no problem wandering up left into the hand that quietly sits down on the sofas to wait for their particular brand of cigarettes, which I learn the hospital doesn't care for – they come in with the packs themselves and the nurses keep them in a special tray. As soon as they pull a cigarette out of their respective packages, they walk one by one through a red door, past nurse Monieec, whose job it is to light them all. When the door closes, the smell comes out from under it and you can hear everyone talking at the same time, as if they had saved their words for times when smoke sent them through.

'How are you on your first day, Dariez?' Nurse Monieec asked me five minutes ago when she closed the door. 'You don't smoke, I see.'

'No.'

'That's good. Terrible habit. And there are so many things happening to children your age.'

'A lot of my friends smoke. I only, you know... I never liked it.'

'I see you adapt quite well to the ground.'

'And.'

'Good, good, that's so important. Tomorrow we will talk more about your adjustment and your situation and how you feel.'

'Okay.'

'You have to take care of this one,' Humble said. 'He's smart.'

'Oh yes?' asked Monieec.

I was looking for the blonde girl, Joy - I had to think about meeting her, but she wasn't there. Neither does Solomon. Next to Humble was the girl he identified as a professor, watching us with her bugged eyes. Without being asked, Humble began talking to me and Monieec about his old friend, who, in his words, 'had pig's tail nipples, like curly fries, I'm not kidding you.' Monieec laughed and laughed. The professor said Humble was disgusting. Monieec said it was okay to laugh once in a while, and did she have a story to tell?

'Yes, we all know you had some indiscretions in your youth, Professor,' Humble blurted out.

The professor got a dreamy look in her eyes. I almost thought she was going to have a seizure. And she said in a light little voice, with a wink at the nose: 'I had many boys, but I only had one boy.'

I wondered where I had heard this before when Armelio interrupted.

'C'mon buddy! The phone is for you!' 'Right.' I get up.

'You're lucky, buddy. It's after ten. They usually turn off the phone at ten o'clock.'

Turn off the phone. I imagine a big lever in my head, a boy lifting it down.

'What happens if someone calls and the phone is turned off?'

'It rings and rings,' Humble shouts, 'and the kids know they're no longer in Kansas.'

I walk down the hallway. The coin receiver hangs and sways. I record it.

'Hello?'

'Hey, is that the crazy trash can?' It's Kristopher. It's Kristopher, high.

'How did you get that number?' I ask. The boy with the beard, whom I saw rocking in the dining room when I first walked in, walks through the central hall and stares at me.

'My girl gave it to me, what do you think? What's it like in there, buddy?' asks Kristopher.

'How do you know where I am?'

'I checked, boy! Do you think I'm an idiot? I go to the same school as you! I did a reverse number search and found exactly where you are: UMPC hospital, adult psychiatry! Man, how did you get into an adult? Do they serve beer up there?'

'Kristopher, c'mon.'

'I'm serious. How about girls? Are there any hot girls!'

I hear laughter in the background, about rap. 'Give the phone!' Richard's high bleating comes through the line.

'Lemme speak!'

Richard comes into focus: 'Man, can you get me Vicodin?'

Howls. Laughter. And in the background, Emmah protests: 'Guys, don't bother him.'

'Gim-me- Dariez, no, seriously.' Kristopher is at it again. 'I'm sorry, boy. I... But how are you, boy?'

'I am... Okay.' I start sweating.

'What happened?'

'I didn't have a good night and checked into the hospital.'

'What does it mean, 'didn't have a good night'?'

The boy in my belly is back, tugging at me. I want to vomit through the phone.

'I'm depressed, okay, Kristopher?'

'Yes, I know about what?'

'No, boy, I'm generally depressed. I have clinical depression.'

'No way! You're like the happiest boy I know!'

'What are you talking about?'

'That's a joke, Dariez. You're like the craziest person I know. Do you remember the bridge? But you know, the problem is that you don't chill enough. Even when you're here, you're always worried about school or something; You never just sit back and let things slide, you know what I mean? We're having a party tonight – where will you be?'

'Kristopher, who's in the room?'

'Emmah, Richard, Scruggs, uh... my friend Delilah.' I don't even know Delilah.

'So-o, all these kids know where I am now.'

'Man, we think it's great where you are! We want to visit!'

'I can't believe you.'

'Was?'

'I can't believe you do.'

'Don't be a girl. You know, if I was in the psychiatric ward, you'd call me and attack me a little bit. Because we're friends, boy!' 'It's not a psychiatric ward.'

'Was?'

'It's a psychiatric hospital. It is for short-term patients. A psychiatric department is longer.'

'Well, obviously you've been there long enough to be an expert.

How long are you staying?' 'Until I set a baseline.' 'What does that mean? Wait, I still don't understand: What was wrong with you anyway?'

'I told you I was depressed. I take pills for it as your girlfriend.'

'Like my girlfriend?'

'Dariez, shut up!' Emmah screams in the background.

'My girlfriend doesn't take pills,' Kristopher says.

Richard screams, 'The only thing she takes is-' The rest is interrupted by laughter and I hear him being beaten by something.

'Maybe you should talk to her a bit more and find out what she's like,' I say. 'You could learn something.'

'You tell me how to treat Emmah now?' asks Kristopher. I hear him licking his lips. 'What if I didn't know what this was really about?'

'What, Kristopher. What is it really about?'

'You want my girl, buddy. You've wanted them for about two years. You're angry that you didn't get them, and now you've decided to turn into depression, and now you're gone somewhere, probably you'll be turned into someone's bitch, trying to play the pity card to make them end up with you... And I call you as a friend to try to lighten your mood and you hit me with all this crap? Who do you think you are?'

'Yo, Kristopher.'

'Was?'

I'm going to do a trick that Richard showed me. He did it a long time ago, and I think Kristopher forgot about it.

'Me.'

'Was?'

'Me.'

'Was?!'

'She, she, she, she, she-'

I pause. Hold it, hold it...

'F*ck you.'

And I close the phone.

It hits my finger and I go to my room, next to Joy, crying.

'What happened?' He asks.

'I have no friends,' I say, jumping and holding my finger.

'It's hard to learn.'

I look out of the window, through the blinds, into the night. Now I am. I run my finger under cold water in our bathroom. I didn't think I could be more than last night, but here I am. I'm in a hospital. I have sunk to the deepest place where I can be. I'm in a place

where I'm not allowed to shave myself — even if I had to shave biologically — because they're afraid I'm using the razors on myself. And everyone knows it. I am in a place where children have no teeth and eat liquid food. And everyone knows it. I'm in a place where the boy I'm eating with lives in his car. And everyone knows it.

I can't function here anymore. I mean in life: I can't function in this life. I don't feel any better than I was in bed last night, with one difference: when I was in my bed - or my mother's - I could do something about it; Now that I'm here, there's nothing I can do. I can't ride my bike to Kinzua Bridge. I cannot take a whole bunch of pills and sleep well one night; the only thing I can do is crush my head on the toilet seat, and I still don't even know if that would work.

They take away your options and all you can do is live, and it's just like Humble said: I'm not afraid to die; I'm afraid to live. I was scared before, but I'm afraid of even more now that I'm a public joke. The teachers will hear from the students. You'll think I'm trying to find an excuse for bad work.

I get into bed and put the single top sheet over me. "This is...!"

'You're depressed?' Joy says.

'And.'

'I also suffer from depression.'

I feel cycling starting again - I'll get out of here at some point and have to go back to my real life. This place is not real. This is a facsimile of life, for broken children. I can handle the facsimile, but I can't handle the real thing. I'm going to have to go back to Executive Pre-Professional and deal with teachers and Kristopher and Emmah, because what the hell do I know? I put everything on this stupid test. What else am I good at?

Nothing. I'm not good at anything.

I get up and go to the nurses' station.

'I won't be able to sleep.'

'You can't sleep?' The nurse is a white-haired little old lady with glasses.

'No, I know I can't sleep,' I reply. 'I take preventive measures.'

'We have a sedative called Atavan. It is injectable. It will relax you and let you sleep.'

'Let's do it,' I say, and with Paullie's supervision, I sit down at the phones and have a small needle attached to what looks like a butterfly clip in my arm. I stare forward

as something yellow is pumped into me, and then I stumble into my room-stumbling because I feel it hitting me, even as I get up from the chair. It's kind of a powerful muscle relaxant, and loving hands pull me down as I fall past the thoughts of joy in my head into bed, but the last thought I have before I go to sleep is:

Great, soldier, now you're depressed and in the hospital and addicted to drugs. And everyone knows it.

If I choose a meal for myself, what are the chances that the UMPC hospital will get the only thing I can handle now? Between fish nuggets and veal marsala and a Technicolor quiche and other disgusting objects, I see trays distributed to other children (Armelio, the president, distributes all the trays, announcing the children's names: 'Gilner, Gilner, this is my new friend!') I get curry-flavored chicken breast: it doesn't have real liquid curry, just a nice infusion of yellow spices and a plastic knife and fork to cut it. It also has broccoli, the vegetables I like best, and herb carrots on the side.

When I open the plastic lid, I grin because I know something has shifted in my stomach – not the Great Shift, but something concrete and I'm going to eat that. In addition to chicken and vegetables, the tray contains coffee, hot water, a tea bag, milk, sugar, salt, pepper, juice, yogurt and a cookie. It's such a good looking meal as I can remember. I start cutting the chicken into slices. 'Does anyone have extra salt?' Humbly, across my table, stretches his neck into the room.

'Here,' I told him of my salt package. 'I would have joined you.'

'You see, you didn't talk to me,' Humble says, pouring the salt on his chicken and looking at me through eyes surrounded by thin and purple colored skin, as if he had been beaten into both a week ago. 'So, of course, I assumed you were one of those yuppies.'

'I'm not.' I put a chicken in my mouth. It tastes good.

'There are a lot of yuppies in this place, and you have this look around you, you know — the yuppie look of kids with money?'

'And.'

'Children who don't care about other children. Unlike me. You see, I really care about other kids. Does that mean that sometimes I'm not inclined to beat someone out of it? No, but that's my environment. I'm like an animal.'

'We are all like animals,' I say. 'Especially now that we all sit in one room and eat. It reminds me of high school.'

'You're smart, I can see that. We are all animals, high school are animals, but some of us are more animal than others. As in Animal Farm I read, all animals are created equal, but some are more equal than others? Here in the real world, all the same people have created an animal, but some are more animal than others. Wait a minute, let me write this down.' Humble reaches behind him to the one window in the dining room, under which board games are piled up. He pulls Scrabble from the top of the pile, fishes a pen out of the box, takes out the board, turns it over, and writes on the back, which is already covered with doodles.

'Humble!' Paullie says from the door.

'Hey, hey, okay!' He throws his hands up. 'I didn't!'

'Like young-y we have to tell you, no writing on the Scrabble board! Do you need pencil and paper?' 'Whatever,' he says. 'Everything is in here.' He points to his head and then turns back to me as if absolutely nothing has interrupted our conversation. 'Me and you, we may be the same, but I'm more animalistic.'

'Uh-huh.' I chose the right place to sit.

'I have to be the alpha male in every situation. That's why, as soon as I noticed you, I made a few judgments. I saw that you were very young. Now in the wild, the lion sees the new cub from another pack, another race, he will kill and eat these cubs so that he can breed his offspring. But here' - he gestures around as if you have to explain what 'here' is, as if you don't just take it for granted when you're inside, unfortunately there seems to be a distinct lack of women who accept my breeding potential. So in your youth, you're not a threat to me.'

'I understand.' On the other side of the room, Joy tries to open her juice with one hand. The other hand remains at his side; I can't tell if he can't move it or just doesn't want to. Paullie comes over and helps him.

'It will come to Ya!' he says.

'Do you feel that I am a threat to you?' Humbly asks.

'No, you seem to be a pretty cool boy.' I munch.

Humble nod. His food, which lay on the plate in front of him, very innocent and clueless, gets upset in the next twenty seconds as he eats half of it. I continue my slow and steady pace.

'When I was your age, you're fifteen, aren't you?'

I nod, 'How do you know that?'

'I'm good with age. When I was fifteen, I had this chick that was twenty-eight. I don't know why, but she loved me. Well, I smoked a lot back then, my whole life was pot...'

It's strange how your stomach can come back. When I turn off Humble, I don't eat because I want to, not because I have to overcome anything, not to prove myself to anyone, but because it's there. I eat because children do. And somehow, when the food is put in front of you by an institution, when there's a big gray force behind it and you don't have to thank anyone for it, you have the animal instinct to make it disappear before a rival like Humble comes along and snatches it away. I think while I'm chewing, my problem might be thinking too much.

That's why you have to join the army, soldier. I thought I was already in the army, sir!

You're in the mental army, Gilner, not the U.S. Army. So, should I join?

I don't know: Can you handle it?

I don't know.

Well, you seem to know that you like order and discipline. That's what the army offers young men like you, Gilner, and that's what you get here. But I don't want to be in the army; I want to be normal.

You also have to think about something - do it then, soldier, because normal is not a job for me.

Continued: 2

'Do you have a girlfriend?' Humbly asks.

'Was?'

'And you? Somewhere out there. You have a hot little fifteen-year-old?' He points at me with his food-colored fork.

'No!' I smile and think of Emmah.

'But they have sweet ones.' Humbly runs his hand through hair that is no longer there. He has hairy dark arms with tattoos of jokers, swords, bulldogs and pirate ships. 'They make the girls sweeter and sweeter.' 'It's all hormones,' I say.

'That's right. You are very smart. You have sugar?'

I hand over a packet of sugar. I have my chicken ready and I could eat more, honestly, but I don't know who to ask. Could just as well make the tea. I open the tea bag labeled 'Sweet-Touch-Nee,' a brand I've never heard of and aren't convinced exists, and stain my water with a bunch of deep dips. When I'm done, Paullie approaches with the second tray of food, identical to the first.

'You look like you could handle a few seconds,' he says.

'Thank you.'

'Eat.'

I tackle the second chicken. I am a working machine. Part of me is working, which wasn't the case before.

'The girls, they drink all this milk with cow hormones,' I say between bites, 'and they develop much younger.' 'You tell me!' Humble says. 'The crazy thing is that the girls in my time were much better than my father's girls. I wonder what the next generation will look like.'

'Sex-roboter.'

'Heh. Where are you from?'

'Close here.'

'This neighborhood? Nice. Must have been a quick ride.

If you came by ambulance. And I don't assume and I don't judge. I'm just curious.' He eats two gigantic bites of his food, chews and continues, 'How did you get here?'

He broke the rule of Six North. But maybe it's not a rule.

Or maybe the food breaks with someone.

'I checked myself in.'

'Did you? Why?'

'I felt pretty bad; I wanted to kill myself.'

'Buddy, that's what I told my doctor the other day. I told him, 'Doc, I'm not afraid of dying; I'm just afraid to live, and I want to put that bayonet through my stomach,' and then I stopped taking my blood pressure medication. Because I have high blood pressure in addition to everything else, in addition to the drugs they have me here, that are tearing

me out of my mind; If I don't eat a lot of salt to regulate my blood pressure, I'm going to die, so when I told him I wasn't taking my medication, he said, 'What, are you crazy? Do you want to kill yourself?!

And I looked him straight in the eye and said, 'Yes.' And they carted me here.'

'Hm.'

'The problem is that I've been living in my car for a year. I have nothing; I have the clothes on my back and that's it. The only thing I have is the car and now the car has been towed away and all my stuff is in. There's thirty-five hundred dollars' worth of film equipment in there.'

'Wow.'

'So-o, in the next few days I have to call the police station, the tow yard, go to an adult home and talk to my daughter. She's about your age. The mother I am completely over, but the daughter I love to death. The mother I want to love to death.'

'Heh.'

'Don't do me any favors; Only laugh when it's funny.'

'That's it!'

'Good. Because right now I didn't peg you as a yuppie. You are something else. I'm not sure what you are, but I'll find out.'

'Cool.'

'I'm going to get my medication so I can sit through this afternoon with my head completely shattered.' Humbly glides away; I finish eating the chicken. When it's done — clean record — I feel better than anything I've done in a long time, maybe a year. That's all I have to do. Keith hesitated at the Anxiety Management Center, but he was right — all you need is food, water, and shelter. And here I have all three. What's next?

I look across the dining room, and three of the younger children, the tall girl, the girl with dark hair and blue strand, and the blonde girl with cuts are all sitting together.

'C'mere.' Blue Streak winks.

It's been a while since a few girls invited me to their table. For the first time.

'Me?' I point to myself.

'No, the other new kid,' says Blue Streak.

I'm not sure what to do with my tablet. I get up, turn around, then I turn to the girls, then I turn back and forth.

'On the wagon,' says Blue Streak. She turns to the big girl. 'God, he's so cute.'

Did she just say that? I put my tray on the cart and sit down with the girls in the empty seat.

'What's your name?' Blue Streak asks.

'Ah, Dariez.'

'So, what's it like to be the hottest boy in here, Dariez?' My body hooks and jerks like a pulley system. She got it all wrong - she's the hot one. It's hard to tell if their skin or teeth are the more perfect white. Her eyes are dark and her lips pouting and open; The blue stripe emphasizes the contrast of hair and face, and she smiles at me - that smiles. I don't know how I didn't notice their sharpness before when I looked into the dining room.

'Beth,' says the big girl. She leans towards me. 'I'm Becca. Don't take advantage of Beth; She's a sex addict.' Beth smacks her lips: 'Shut up!' She turns around.

'I'm only here one more day.' She slides forward. 'You want to spend it with me?'

I think about what Humble would say. He would say yes, absolutely, because he's the alpha male. I try to develop and drop my words, to keep my voice low and quiet: 'Yes, absolutely.'

'Good,' she says, and there's a heat on my knee and a hand moving up my leg. She leans into it. 'I think you're really hot.' The hand encloses my thigh. 'I have my private room because I'm so messed up they won't let me sleep with anyone else.'

'You have your private room because you're a slut!' Becca corrects herself and Beth kicks her.

'Ouch!'

Without warning, the blonde girl with the cuts on her face gets up and quickly leaves the room. I look through the window at her: nothing.

'Forget them,' says Beth. 'She's not good for you.' Then, when she triggers an out-of-body experience that really makes me wonder if I was dreaming this or died and went into some kind of horrible hell, she flicks her tongue around her lips in a perfect O.

Something flashes in the hall. The blonde girl wanders to the window. I can't be sure if she is. I mean, it's a her-it has breasts. And I think I recognize her little body and

her woman beater. But I can't see her face because she presses herself against a piece of paper against the glass:

BEWARE OF PENILE

The sign slides down like in an elevator. 'What are you looking at?' Asks Beth and turns around. I eye her body as she turns; From the waist up, she doesn't look like she has a penis. I keep my peripheral view of the hall in case the messenger returns.

'Ha!' Becca is like. 'Joy has done it to you again.' 'You what?' Beth is standing. It has a round and feminine shape. Her legs are wrapped in jeans that have ruffles around her butt.

'I can't believe her... Hey.' She turns around. 'You're looking at my pants?'

'Yes,' I swallowed. I have lost all alpha masculinity. Could I be like a theta man? You have to be lucky sometimes.

Being at the top of the sexual food chain is a huge pressure.

'I made them myself,' she says. 'I'm a fashion designer.'

'Wow? It's like a real job.' My mind is spinning; It has somehow fallen from the sex track into elementary school logic. 'I thought you were my age; How did you learn how to design clothes-'

'All right,' Paullie intervenes. 'Playtimes' over. C'mon, Charles.'

'What the hell!' Beth jumps a few inches into the air and stamps her feet. Then, the horror of horror, her voice drops two octaves. 'You guys don't let me have fun!' It's a bad voice, even for a boy, like a croaking frog. Becca laughs and laughs, doubles down on herself, and all I can do is catch my breath and stare at her glasses.

Beth for characters. Ce n'est pas possible. It's flat, that's all. She has big hands; Many girls have big hands. She doesn't have an Adam's apple - oh, wait, she's wearing a turtleneck sweater.

'C'mon, don't bother Dariez,' Paullie says.

'But he's so cute!'

'He's not cute, he's a hospital patient like you. Thou shalt go out to-morrow; Don't put it at risk. Have you taken your medicine yet?'

'Hormone treatments.' Beth/Charles winks at me.

'C'mon, enough.'

Becca laughs, sighs. 'Oh, she caught you well. I get my medication.'

I look down at the table as they leave. I need some meds. I glance up and see patients lined up at the desk next to the phone, the nurses' station, eagerly passing the times in their little ways- President Armelio bopping from foot to foot, Joy-a holding the hand that refuses to work-before getting pills in little plastic cups. Beth / Charles and Becca eventually appear at the end of the line, chatting and gesticulating, and Beth / Charles blows me a kiss. I don't think I need to be in line behind them right now. Besides, all I take is Zoloft in the morning; if they wanted me on something midday, they would have told me.

When Becca and J / C are gone and I'm still sitting shell-shocked at the table, another sign appears at the window, this one inching up from below as if hoisted by spider threads:

DON'T WORRY. HE / SHE / IT GETS EVERYBODY, WELCOME TO SIX NORTH!

When I go out to find her, she isn't there. I ask the nurse wrapping up her dispensing duties if I need any meds, and she says I'm not scheduled for any. I ask her if I can have some. She asks what I need them for. I tell her, to deal with this crazy place. She says if they had pills for that, they wouldn't need places like this in the first place, would they?

'So, what's it like?' Mom asks, holding a tote bag of toiletries, with Dad and Sarah next to her. We're at the end of the right H leg, me in one chair facing the three of them. Visiting hours are from 12 to 8 on Saturday.

Sarah doesn't let me answer.

'It's like One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest!' she says, excited. She's dressed up in jeans and a fake suede jacket for Six North. 'I mean, all these kids look like... serious crazies!'

'Sh-hh,' I tell her. 'My-a Joy's right there.' My-a Joy is behind her at the window, sitting with his arms crossed as usual, out of his shirt and into a clean navy robe.

'Who's My-a Joy?' Mom asks eagerly.

'The boy I came in with downstairs. I think he's schizophrenic.'

'Doesn't that mean he has two personalities?' Sarah asks, turning. 'Like, he's not just Joy-a; he's also Molly or something.'

'No, you'd be surprised, that's a different one,' I raise my eyebrows. 'Joy-a my-a's just a little... scattered.' Joy-a sees me looking at him and smiles. 'I tell you, you play those numbers, it'll come to Ya!' he chirps.

'I think he's talking about Lotto numbers,' I explain. 'I've been trying to figure it out.'

'Oh my gosh.' My sister covers her face.

'No, Sarah, don't do that, watch,' Mom says. She turns around. 'Thank you very much, Joy.'

'I tell you: it the truth!'

'I like this place,' Mom turns back. 'I think it's full of good kids.'

'I like it.' Dad leans in. 'When can I join?' But when no one laughs, he leans back, clasps his hands, sighs.

'Is that a transvestite?' Sarah asks. J / C is down the hall, like forty feet away, and I don't know for the life of me how Sarah suspects something out there that I couldn't see at the point-blank range.

'No, now listen-'

'Is it?' Dad squints.

'Boys!'

'Transvestite!' My-a Joy shrieks. He does it at top range-I haven't heard him that loud before. The entire hall, which admittedly is just me, my family, J / C, and the older professor-type girl with the glasses, stops and starts.

'I tell you once, it'll come: it comes to Ya!'

J / C starts walking toward us. 'Are we talking about me?' he asks in his boy's voice. He waves at my-a Joy.

'Hey, my-a Joy.' He comes right up to me and my sister.

'Dariez, your name is, right?' 'Yeah,' I mumble.

'Wow, is this your family?'

'Yeah.' I tip my palm at each of them-it's at the level of the frills on his pants. 'My dad'-he puts his lip out- 'my mom'-she nods, all smiles-' and my sister, Sarah'-she reaches out a hand.

'Oh my God, so lovely!' J / C says. 'I'm Charles.' He shakes with everyone. 'They're going to take really good care of your son here. He's a good boy.'

'How about you; what are you in for?' Dad asks. I kick him. Doesn't he know what not to ask?

'It's okay, Dariez!' J / C touches my shoulder. 'My gosh, did you just kick your dad? I never even did that.' He addresses Dad: 'I have bipolar, sir, and I had an episode, and they brought me here. I'm going back upstate today. But the doctors are very attentive here, and the turnaround time is great.' 'Wonderful,' Mom says.

'Of course,'-J / C gestures to us-' it's a lot better when you have family support. They want to make sure they discharge you into a safe environment. I don't have that.' He shakes his head. 'Dariez, you're very lucky.' I look at them: my safe environment. I frankly wouldn't be surprised to find any of them in Six North. 'Well, I'll leave you, boys, to your afternoon,' J / C says. He walks away slowly.

My-a Joy makes an indecipherable high-pitched whining noise.

'That's applause, isn't it?' Dad asks, throwing a thumb behind him. 'I like that.'

'Those are awesome pants,' Sarah says.

'Okay, so let's get down to business, Dariez,' Mom is like.

'What do you need?'

'I need a phone card. I need you, boys, to take my phone and leave it plugged in so the calls register. I need some clothes, like what you were brought before, Mom. I don't need towels; they have those. Magazines would be good. And a pencil and paper, that would rock.' 'Simple enough. What kind of magazines?'

'Science magazines! He loves those,' Dad says.

'He might not be up for science magazines right now,' Mom answers. 'Do you want anything lighter?' 'Do you want Star?' Sarah asks.

'Sarah, why would I want Star?'

'Because it's awesome.' She reaches into her purse- her first one, black, a recent Mom purchase-and unrolls a glossy pink monstrosity, complete with pictures of the most recent spectacular outing of a celebrity breast in public.

I hold it up for my-a Joy.

'Mm-hm! 'He says. 'I tell you! I tell you! It comes to yah!'

'That's very nice,' says the professor girl with bugged-out eyes, who I somehow didn't realize had migrated right behind me.

'Oh, excuse me,' she looks up. 'I wasn't listening to your conversation at all.' She walks into her room.

'Um... 'Sarah says.

'I'll take it,' I say. I put it under my seat. 'I think the floor will enjoy it.'

'Is it just me, or are you starting to develop a sort of allegiance to the tribe?' Dad asks.

'Sh-hh.' I smile.

'Dariez, the next order of business: have you called Dr. Jarnerny?'

'No.'

'Have you called Dr. Ross?'

'No.'

'Well, they both need to know where you are, for health insurance reasons and because they're your doctors and they care about you and this is going to be very important to them.'

'Their numbers are in my phone.'

'Well, let's call them; we picked up your phone from the front,' Mom reaches into her bag-

'No!' Dad grabs her hands. 'Don't take out the phone!'

'Don't be ridiculous, honey. Dariez's the one who's not allowed to have it, not us.'

'Well, uh, I don't think we want to be getting our son in trouble. This isn't the kind of place you want to be getting sent to a time-out.'

I look at him.

'That's not that funny.'

'What? Oh, sorry,' he says.

'No, Dad, seriously. It's not ... I mean, this is serious business.'

'I'm just trying to lighten the mood, Dariez-'

'Well, that's what you're always trying to do. Let's just, not do it here.'

Dad nods, looks me dead in the eyes; slowly and regretfully, he banishes all the smiling and joking from his face, and for once he's just my dad, watching his son who has fallen so low. 'All right, then.' We stay quiet.

'Is that the truth, my-a Joy?' I ask without looking at him.

'It's the truth, and it comes to yah!' I smile.

'We'll handle the phone later,' Dad sums up.

'Next order of business?' Mom asks.

'How long I'm going to be in here, I think.'

'How long do you think?'

'A couple of days. But I haven't seen the doctor yet.'

Dr. Mahmoud.'

'Right, how is he? Is he good?'

'I don't know, Mom. You met him for as long as I did. He makes rounds soon, and I'll get to talk with him.'

'I think you need to stay here until you're better, Dariez. You don't want to come out early and have to come back; that's how you get 'in the system.'"

'Right. I won't. I think that's a big part of places like this: they make them so you don't want to come back.

'How's the food?' Sarah asks.

'Oh, I almost forgot,' I look at my family. 'I'm ... I know I shouldn't be proud of this; it's like really sad that this is my big accomplishment of the day... but I ate everything at lunch.'

'You did?' Mom stands up, pulls me up, and hugs me.

'Yeah.' I pull away. 'It was a chicken. I ate two helpings of it.'

'Girl, that is a big one,' Dad gets up and shakes my hand.

'No, it's not, it's really simple, everybody does it, but for me, it's like a stupid triumph-'

'No,' Mom says, looking me in the eyes. 'What's a triumph is that you woke up this morning and decided to live. That's a triumph. That's what you did today.' I nod at her. Like I say, I'm not a crier.

'Yeah, cause if you had died ...' Sarah is like, 'that would have sucked.' She rolls her eyes and hugs my leg.

I sit back down. 'Once the food is in front of you it's just like, eat. I mean, they're professionals here; they know how to take kids and put them in a routine that gives them something to do.'

'That's right,' Mom says. 'So, what are you going to do now?'

'I think there are activities-'

'Hey, Dariez, is this your family?' President Armelio steps on the scene. His half-harelip and hair shock my sister, but his relentless enthusiasm for just-I don't know-living-would knock the fear out of anybody.

He shakes all the hands and says we're a beautiful family and I'm a good boy, he can tell.

'Dariez's my friend! Hey, buddy-you want to play cards?'

President Armelio holds up a deck of playing cards like he just fished it out of the sea.

'Yeah, absolutely!' I say. I stand up. When was the last- time I played cards? Before the test, probably-before high school.

'All right!' Armelio says. 'My kind of boy! Let's do it. I've been looking and looking: nobody here likes to play cards as I do! What do you want to play? Spades? I'll crush you, buddy; I'll crush you.'

I look at my parents. 'We'll call you,' Mom says. 'And hey- what about sleeping?'

'I'm wired right now,' I say. 'But I'll crash. I'm starting to get a headache.'

'A Headache? Buddy, once I crush you in spades, you're going to have a lot bigger headache!' Armelio toddles away to the dining room to set up the cards.

'See yah,' Sarah says, hugging me.

'Bye, son.' Dad shakes my hand.

'I love you,' Mom says. 'I'll call you with the doctors' phone numbers.'

'And bring a phone card.'

'And I'll bring a phone card. You hang in there, Dariez.' 'Yeah, I will.' And as soon as they're around the bend, I head into the dining room and learn how to play spades for the rest of the afternoon, which Armelio does crush me in.

I'm afraid of making phone calls. The phone on Six North is a hubbub of activity, with Joy and the blond burned-out-type, who I learn is named Joy, fielding calls from, I assume, their respective female counterparts. Joy starts off his calls happily and says-

'Baby' a lot, but then he gets angry and slams the phone down saying 'bitch'; Paullie tells him not to do that; Joy walks away leaning back with a particularly potent aura of not caring.

Five minutes later, another call comes in for him, and he's back to 'Baby.' He doesn't even answer the phone, though; President Armelio has that job.

When he answers, he always says 'Jack's Pub,' and then finds whoever the call's for.

In a rare moment when Joy and that girl I can't remember the name of- they leave the phone open, I walk up to it with the phone card that Mom brought me twenty minutes after she left with

Dad and Sarah. I pick up and hear the dial tone, dial the 800 number for the phone card... and then stop. I can't do it.

I just don't want to deal with it.

Kids on the outside world don't know what's happened to me I'm in a sort of stasis right now. Things are under control. But the dam will break. Even if I'm here just through Monday, the rumors will start flying, and the homework will pile up.

Where's Dariez?

He's sick.

He's not sick, he got alcohol poisoning because he can't handle real liquor.

I heard he took someone's pills and freaked out. I heard he realized he's gay and he's coming to grips with it.

I heard his parents are sending him to a different school.

He couldn't handle it here, anyway. He was always such a loser.

He's freaking out in front of his computer. He can't move or anything. He's catatonic.

He woke up and thinks he's a horse.

Well, whatever, what's question three?

There were two messages on my phone when I came in, and now there are probably more, each one necessitating a callback, and the call back possibly necessitating another callback Tentacles- leading me right back to where I was last night. I can't go there, so I wait. I can wait for five minutes. But then Joy's on the line. And then I wait another five minutes. And the messages are piling up. And this isn't even counting email. What sort of hellish assignments have my teachers e-mailed out?

'Excuse me, are you using the phone?' the giant black girl with the cane asks as I stare at it.

'Yeah, uh.' I pick up the receiver in my hands. 'Yes. Yes, I am.'

'Okay.' She smiles, rolling her gums, not showing teeth. I start dialing, enter my PIN, enter my number.

'Please enter your password, then press the pound sign.'

I obey.

'You have-three-new messages. 'One more than before. Not so bad.

'First new message: message marked urgent.' Uh-oh.

'Hey, Dariez, it's Emmah, I just, um ... we talked, and you were sounding really bad. I just wanted to make sure you were doing all right, and since you're not answering- it's like two AM, I mean, why would you be answering? But I'm kind of worried that maybe you went and did something stupid because of me. Don't. I mean, it's sweet, but don't. Okay, that's it, I'm with Kristopher, he's being a total dick. Bye.'

'To erase this message-'

I hit 7.

'Next message.'

'Dariez, it's Kristopher, call me back son! Let's chill-' I hit 7-7.

'Next message.' 'Hello, Mr. Gilner, this is your science teacher, Mr. Reynolds. I got your phone number from the student directory. We need to talk about the lack of your labs; I'm missing five of them-' 7-7.

'End of messages.'

I put the phone down like it's a dangerous animal. I pick back up, call home. Can't stop now.

'Sarah, can you get the phone numbers of Emmah and Kristopher out of my cell? And look through the recent missed calls for something from Knox; I have to call my science teacher.' 'Sure. How are things over there?'

I look to my left. A Hasidic Jewish boy, complete with the white pants, yarmulke, tassels hanging off him, braided hair, and sandals, dashes down the hall toward me. Scraps of red food dot his dark beard, and his eyes are wild and unhinged. He says to me: 'I'm Solomon.'

'Um, I've heard from you. I'm Dariez, but I'm on the phone.' I cut the receiver.

'I would ask you to please keep it down! I'm trying to rest!' He turns and races away, holding his pants.

'O-ooh! Solomon introduced himself to you!' hoots the girl with the cane. 'That's big.' 'It's normal,' I tell my sister.

'Okay, here.' She gives me Emmah's and Kristopher's and the teacher's numbers; I write them down on a scrap of paper that Paullie has given me. I should've known these before. Emmah's looks good written down- wholesome and useful. The science teachers look jagged and hateful. I may not be able to call him until tomorrow.

'Thanks, Sarah-bye.'

I hang up and look at the lady with the cane.

'Hey, I'm Dariez,' I say.

'Ebony.' She nods. We shake hands.

'Ebony, it's cool if I just make one more call?'

'Of course.'

I dial the 800 number, enter my PIN, dial Emmah.

'Hello?'

'Hey, Emmah, it's me.'

'Dariez, where are you?'

It's funny how kids ask that as soon as they get you on the phone. I think it's a byproduct of cell phones: kids-girls and moms especially- want to nail you down in physical space. The fact is that you could be anywhere on a cell phone and it shouldn't be important where you are. But it becomes the first thing kids ask.

'I'm at a friend's house. In Knox.'

I wonder, too, how ~Sped~ lies cell phones have contributed to the world.

'Uh-huh, Dariez. I don't think so.'

'What do you mean?' I wipe the sweat off my brow. The sweat is starting again. This isn't good. I was sweating down in the ER, but I wasn't sweating at lunch.

'You're not at any friend's house. You're probably at some girl's house.'

I look at Ebony. She smiles and leans forward on her cane.

'Yeah, totally.'

'I know you. Last night you had me on the phone; tonight, you're out hooking up with some girl.'

'Sure, Emmah-'

'Seriously, how are you? Thanks for calling back. I was worried.'

'I know, I got your message.'

'I don't want you to freak out over me. I think you just need some time to decompress a little bit, and not think about me and think about someone else. Because like, I know we might be good for each other, but I'm with someone else, you know?'

'Right... um... I wasn't freaking out about you last night, actually.'

'No?'

'No, I was freaking out about, like, much bigger things. I was having kind of a crisis, and I wanted to reach out to somebody who understood.'

'But you asked me if we would ever have been able to be together.'

'Well, I was trying to clear that up because Ya' know ... I wanted to do something stupid.'

She drops her voice: 'Kill yourself?'

'Yeah.'

'You wanted to kill yourself over me?'

'No!' I scowl. 'I was just in a really bad place, and you were part of it because you're a part of my life, just like Kristopher is a part of it and my family is a part of it, but I thought you could clear something up for me before I...'

'Dariez, I'm so flattered.'

'No, you have the wrong idea. Don't be flattered.'

'How could I not be? I never had a boy want to kill himself for me before. It's like the most robotic thing.'

'Emmah, it wasn't about you.'

'Are you sure?'

I look down, and the answer is right there in my chest and it's rebounding. 'Yes. I have bigger problems than you.' 'Ah, okay.'

'And you shouldn't assume that everything is always about you.'

'Whatever. What's wrong with you?'

'Nothing. Everything's a lot better now, actually.'

'You're acting like a total dick. Do you want to come out tonight?'

'I can't.'

'Did Kristopher call you? We're having a big party at his house.'

'Right. I'm probably not going to be partying for... like... a while. Like ever, maybe.'

'Is everything okay now?'

'Yeah, I'm just... I'm figuring some things out.'

'At your friend's house.'

'Correct.'

'Are you like in a crack den or something?'

'No!' I yell, and just then-President Armelio walks up to me:

'Hey, buddy, you want to play spades? I'll crush you.'

'Not now, Armelio.'

'Who's that?' Emmah asks.

'Leave him alone, he's talking with his girlfriend.' Ebony taps Armelio with her cane.

'She's not my girlfriend,' I whisper to her.

'Who's that?'

'My friend Armelio.'

'No, the girl.'

'My friend Ebony.'

'Where are you, Dariez?'

'I got to go.'

'All right...' Emmah trails her voice off. 'I'm glad you're doing... uh... better.' 'I'm doing a lot better,' I say.

She's done, I think. She's done, and you're done with her.

'See Ya, Dariez.' I hang up.

'I think that's over,' I say to myself.

Then I decide to announce it to the hall: 'I think that that's over!' Ebony stomps her cane, and Armelio claps.

Continued: 3

Something deep in my guts, below my heart, has made a shift to the left and settled in a more comfortable place. It's not the Shift, but it's a shift. I picture Emmah with her gorgeous face and little body and black hair and pouty lips and Kristopher's hands all over her but also with her pot-smoking and the pimples on her forehead and making fun of kids all the times and the way she's always so proud of how she's dressed. And I picture her fading.

I play cards with Armelio in the dining room until Joy pokes his head in: 'Dariez? It says on your door Dr. Mahmoud is your doctor? He's making his rounds.'

'I don't want to be here,' I tell him at the entrance to my room, where I catch him before he visits Joy.

'I don't think it's the place for me.'

'Of course not.' Dr. Mahmoud nods. He has on the same suit he had on earlier in the day, although that feels like last year. 'If you liked it here, that would be a very bad prognosis!'

'Right.' I chuckle. 'Well, I mean, everybody's friendly, but I feel a lot better, and I think I'm ready to go. Maybe on Monday? I don't want to miss school.'

Also, doc, right now the phone messages and e-mails are bunching up and the rumors are flying. I just talked to this girl and I did okay-but the Tentacles are coiled and the pressure is rising, getting ready to pounce on me when I leave. If I'm in here too long, I'll have that much more to do when I get out.

'We can't rush it,' Dr. Mahmoud says. 'The important thing is that you get better. If you try to leave too soon-suddenly, everything is better? We doctors' get suspicious.'

'Oh. Well, you don't want the doctor who can sign you out of the psychiatric hospital getting suspicious.' 'Right. Right now, to me, you look much better, but maybe this is a false recovery-'

'A Fake Shift.'

'I'm sorry?'

'A Fake Shift. That's what I call it. When you think you've beaten it, but you haven't?' 'Exactly. We don't want one of those.'

'So, I'm going to be here until I have the real Shift?'

'I don't follow.'

'I'm going to be here until I'm cured?'

'Life is not cured, Mr. Gilner.' Dr. Mahmoud leans in. 'Life is voyaged.'

'Okay.'

I'm not as impressed by this as he would like. He arches back: 'We don't keep you here until you are cured of anything; we keep you here until you are stable-we call it 'establishing the baseline.'" 'Okay, so when will my baseline be established?'

'Five days, probably.'

One, two, three... 'Thursday? I can't wait until Thursday, Doctor. I have too much school. That's four days of school. If I miss four days I will be so behind.

'Plus, my friends...'

'Yes?'

'My friends will know where I am!'

'Aha. Is this a problem?'

'Yes!'

'Why?'

'Because I'm here!' I gestured out at the hall. Solomon shuffles by very quickly in his sandals and tells someone to be quiet, he's trying to rest. 'Mr. Gilner.' Dr. Mahmoud puts a hand on my shoulder. 'You have a chemical imbalance, that is all. If you were a diabetic, would you be ashamed of where you were?'

'No, but-'

'If you had to take insulin and you stopped, and you were taken to the hospital, wouldn't that make sense?'

'This is different.'

'How?'

I sigh. 'I don't know how much of it is chemical. I just think depression's one way of coping with the world. Like, some kids get drunk, some kids do drugs, some kids get depressed.

Because there's so much stuff out there that you have to do something to deal with it.'

'Ah. This is why you need to be in here longer, to talk about these things,' Dr. Mahmoud says. 'You have a psychologist, correct?'

Have you called your psychologist?'

Shoot. I knew I was forgetting something.

'You need to call; your psychologist will come here to meet with you. What is her name? Or his?'

'Dr. Ross.'

'Oh!' Dr. Mahmoud says; his lips curl into a faraway smile. 'Wonderful. Get Andrea down here.' 'Andrea?' I never knew her first name. She keeps it a big secret. It's blacked out on all her degrees. She says it's part of the policy.

He waves his hand. 'Make an appointment with her; then we'll be that much closer to coming up with your treatment plan and getting you out of here as soon as possible. We will try for Thursday.'

'Not before Thursday.'

'No.'

'Thursday,' I mumble to myself, looking across the room at

Joy's prone lump. 'Five days, that's it! Everything will be fine, Mr. Gilner. Your life will wait. You just participate in the group activities and call Dr. Ross. And when you grow up to be rich and successful, you don't forget me, okay?'

'Okay.'

'Can please you close the door?' Joy asks from his bed.

'Joy, you are the next: how come you are always sleeping- sleeping- sleeping?'

Dr. Mahmoud walks past me. I call Mom to report the news, and then I call Dr. Ross. She says she's sorry I took this turn for the worse, but it's always two steps forward, one-step-back.

'If this is my one step back,' I tell her, 'what am I going to do next: win the lottery and get my TV show?'

That'd be a good TV show I think. A boy winning the lottery in the psych hospital.

Dr. Ross can't come in tomorrow, because it's Sunday, but she says she'll be in on Monday. I'm momentarily surprised by the distinction. In Six North, there probably won't be much different.

'They say there's going to be a pizza party tonight,' Humble tells me at dinner. Dinner is chicken tenders with potatoes and salad and a pear. I eat it all. 'But they say that every night.' 'What's a pizza party?'

'We all chip in the money and get pizza from the neighborhood. It's tough because no one ever has any cash. It's like a big deal if we get pepperoni.'

'I have eight dollars.'

'Sh-h. Don't go announcing it!' He stops chewing. 'Kids in here don't have any money. I don't have two cents to rub together.'

I nod. 'I never heard that one before.'

'No? You like it?'

'Yeah.'

'What about: I don't have a pot to piss in or a window to throw it out of.'

'Nope.'

'What about: I got Jack and shit and Jack left town.' 'Heh. No!

Where do you get them all?'

'From the old neighborhood. Gimme a ringy-ding.

Catch Ya on the flipside. It's the best way to talk.'

'A ringy-ding, what's that-a call?'

'Don't ask yuppie questions.'

Humble scans the room for kids to talk about. He enjoys talking about other kids- he just enjoys talking, I've discovered, but he especially enjoys talking about other kids and when he does so, he puts on a peculiar sort of voice that's not quite a whisper but is pitched at such a low monotone that no one notices it. He also seems able to throw it so it feels like he's speaking into my left ear.

'So, I suppose you've become familiar with our lovely clientele here on the floor. President Armelio is the president.' He nods over at Armelio, who has finished his food first and is getting up to return the tray. 'You see how fast he eats? If you could harness a quarter of his energy, you could power the island of Knox. I'm not joking.

He should work in a place with kids like us. He has such a good heart and he's never down.'

'So why is he in here?'

'He's psychotic, of course. You should-a saw him when they brought him in. He was screaming his head off about his mom.

He's Greek.'

'Huh.'

'Now there's Ebony, She of the Ass. That is the biggest ass I've ever seen. I'm not even into asses, but if you were-man, you could lose yourself in there.

It's like its own municipality. I think that's why she needs the cane. She's also the only girl I've ever known who wears velvet pants; I think you have to have a butt like that to wear velvet pants.

They only make them in extra- extra- large.'

'I didn't even notice them.'

'Well, give it a while. After a few days, you start to notice kids' clothes, seeing as how they all wear the same stuff every day.'

'Things don't get dirty?'

'They do laundry on Tuesdays and Fridays. Who gave you your tour when you came in?'

'Joy.'

'He should've told you that.' Humble swivels his head then turns back. 'Now Joy and her too'-they're at a table together, as they were at lunch-' those two were some of the biggest methamphetamine addicts in Clarion, period, in the nineties. They were called Fiend One and Fiend Two. The party didn't start until they showed up.'

That must've been such a feeling, even though all the drugs, I think. To come into a house and have kids well up and greet you: 'All right, boy!' 'You're here!' 'What's up?' That was probably as addictive as the amphetamines. Kids sort of does that to Kristopher.

'What happened to them?' I ask.

'What happens to anybody? They got burned out, lost all their money, ended up here. Got no families, got no women-well, I think Joy has one.'

'He talks on the phone with her.'

'You can't tell from that. Kids pretend to be on the phone all the time. Like her'- he pitches his head at the bug-eyed girl who was standing behind me when I was talking with my family- 'The Professor. I've caught her on the phone talking to Dr. Dial Tone. She's a university professor. She ended up here because she thinks someone tried to spray her apartment with insecticide. She has newspaper clippings about it and everything.'

Humble turns: 'The black kid with the glasses: he looks pretty normal, but he has it bad. You notice he doesn't come out of his room a lot. That's because he's scared that gravity is going to reverse and he's going to fall up into the ceiling. When he goes

outside, he has to be near trees so, in case the gravity stops, he'll have something to hold on to. I think he's about seventeen. Have you talked to him?'

'No!'

'He doesn't talk. I don't know how much they can do for him.'

The boy looks up at the ceiling fan above the dining room, shudders, and forks food into his mouth. 'Then there's my Joy.'

My-a Joy's been here a lot. I've been here twenty-four days, and I've seen him come and go twice. You seem to like him.'

'We came in together.'

'He's a cool boy. And he has good teeth.'

'Yeah, I noticed that.'

'Pearly whites. Not a lot of kids in here have that. I wonder what happened to Ebony's teeth.' 'What's wrong with them?' I turn.

'Don't look. She has none, you didn't notice? She's on a liquid diet. Just gums. I wonder if she sold 'em, tooth by tooth...'

I bite my tongue. I can't help it. I shouldn't be laughing at any of these kids, and neither should Humble, but maybe it's okay, somewhere, somehow, because we're enjoying life? I'm not sure. My-a Joy, two tables away, notices my stifled laughter, smiles at me, and laughs himself.

'I told-jah: it comes to yah!'

'There we go. What is going on in his mind?' Humble asks.

I can't help it. It's too much. I crack up. Juice and chicken tender bits spray my plate.

'Oh, I got you now,' Humble continues. 'And here comes the guest of honor: Solomon.'

The Hasidic Jewish boy comes in holding up his pants. He still has food in his beard. He grabs his tray and opens a microwaved packet of spaghetti and starts shoveling it into his mouth, making slurping, gulping groans.

'This boy eats once a day but it's like his last day on earth,' Humble says. 'I think he's the most far gone of everybody. He's got like a direct audience with God.'

Solomon looks up, twists his head from side to side, and resumes eating.

Humble drops to a true whisper. 'He did a few hundred tabs of acid and blew his pupils out. His eyeballs are probably dilated.'

'No way.'

'Absolutely. It's a certain cult of the Hasidics: the Jewish Acid Heads. There's like a part of their holy writings that tell them it's the way to talk to God. But he took it too far.'

Solomon gets up, leaves his tray disgustedly at the table, and moves out of the room with alarming speed.

'He's like the Mole Boy, back to his hole,' Humble says. 'The real Mole Kids are the anorexics; you don't even see them.'

'How ~Sped~ kids are in here?' I ask.

'They say twenty-five,' Humble says. 'But that's not counting the stowaways.'

I look around. Charles / Beth isn't in the room.

'Did the, uh, you know, Charles? Did he leave?' 'Yeah, the tranny's gone. I left this afternoon. Tranny hit on you?'

'Yeah.'

'Paullie lets him do that. Gets a kick out of it.'

'I can't believe he's just gone. They don't, like, throw a party for you when you leave?'

'No way. Kids here don't want to get out. Getting out means going back to the streets or jail or to try and fish their things out of an impounded car, like me. Your kind of situation, with the parents and a house: that's rare. And also, with so ~Sped~ kids coming and going, we'd be nuts to try and have a party every time. We'd end up like Fiend One and Fiend Two.'

My tray is a mess from the food spraying out. 'You crack me up, Humble,' I tell him.

'I know. I'm great- times for everybody. Too bad I'm in here instead of onstage getting paid for it.'

'Why don't you try going onstage?'

'I'm old.'

'I have to get some napkins.' I rise and go out to Paullie, who hands me a stack. I return, wipe off my tray, and start in on the pear.

'You have a secret admirer,' Humble says. 'I should've guessed. I know how you operate.'

'What?'

'She was just here. Look at your chair.'

I get up and check it. There's a piece of paper lying there, face down. I flip it around, and it says HOPE YOU'RE HAVING A GOOD TIMES. VISITING HOURS ARE TOMORROW FROM 7:00-7:05 PM I DON'T SMOKE. 'See? Your little girl with the cut-up's face just left it.' Humble gets up. 'I had a feeling. Now you're starting to look like a rival male. I might have to keep my eye on you.'

He deposits his tray and gets in line for his meds. I fold the paper up and put it in the pocket where my phone used to be.

Part: 12

'Dariez! Hey buddy! Phone!'

I'm sitting with Humble outside the smoking lounge for the 10 PM cigarette break, thinking about where I was at the last 10 PM: just getting into Mom's bed. Humble doesn't smoke, says it's disgusting, but everyone else in here does, practically, including the black boy who's afraid of gravity, and the big girl, Becca, both of whom I thought were underage. Armelio, Ebony, Joy, Joy, Joy ... no matter how nuts they all seem, they have no problem migrating to the upper left of the Hand sitting down on the couches quietly to wait for their particular brand of cigarettes, which I learn the hospital does not provide for them-they come in with the packs themselves and the nurses keep them in a special tray. Once they pull a cigarette out of their respective packs, they walk single file through a red door, passing Nurse Monieec, whose job is to light everybody up. When the door closes, the smell drifts out from under it and you hear talking everybody talking all at once, as if they saved their words for a time when there was smoke to send them through.

'How're you doing for your first day, Dariez?' Nurse Monieec asked me five minutes ago, as she closed the door. 'You don't smoke, I see.'

'No.'

'That's good. Terrible habit. And it happens so much to kids your age.'

'A lot of my friends smoke. I just, you know... never liked it.'

'I see you are adjusting quite well to the floor.'

'Yeah.'

'Good, good, that is so important. Tomorrow we're going to talk more about your adjustment and your situation and how you're feeling.'

'Okay.'

'You got to watch out for this one,' Humble said. 'He's crafty.'

'Oh yeah?' Monieec asked.

I was looking for the blond girl, Joy- I had to remember to meet her but she wasn't around. Neither was Solomon. Next to Humble was the girl he identified as the Professor, watching us with her bugged-out eyes. Unprompted, Humble started talking with me and Monieec about this old girlfriend of his, who had, in his words, 'pig-tail nipples, like curly fries, I kid you not.' Monieec laughed and laughed. The Professor said Humble was disgusting. Monieec said it was okay to laugh once in a while, and did she have a story to share?

'Yeah, we all know you had some indiscretions in your youth, Professor,' Humble prodded.

The Professor got a dreamy look in her eyes. I almost thought she was going to have a seizure. And she said, in a light little voice, with a nasal twinge: 'I had a lot of boys, but I only had one boy.'

I was wondering where I'd heard that before when Armelio interrupted.

'C'mon buddy! The phone is for you!' 'Right.' I get up.

'You're lucky, buddy. It's after ten. They usually shut the phone off at ten.'

Shut the phone off. I picture a big lever in my mind, a boy heaving it down.

'What happens if someone calls and the phone's off?'

'It just rings and rings,' Humble yells out, 'and kids know they're not in Kansas anymore.'

I walk down the hall. The pay-phone receiver is hanging and swaying. I pick it up.

'Hello?'

'Hey, is this the loony bin?' It's Kristopher. It's Kristopher, high.

'How'd you get this number?' I ask. The boy with the beard, who I saw rocking in the dining room when I first came in, is pacing the central hall, staring at me.

'My girl gave it to me, what do you think? What's it like in there, dude?' Kristopher asks.

'How do you know where I am?'

'I looked it up, boy! Do you think I'm an idiot? I go to the same school as you! I did a reverse number search and found exactly where you are: UMPC Hospital, Adult Psychiatric! Dude, how'd you get in an adult? Do they serve beer up there?'

'Kristopher, c'mon.'

'I'm serious. How about girls? Are there any hot girls around-ow!'

I hear laughing in the background, above rap. 'Gim-me the phone!' Richard's high-pitched bleat comes through the line.

'Lemme talk!'

Richard comes into focus: 'Dude, can you get me any Vicodin?'

Howls. Howls of laughter. And in the background, Emmah protesting: 'Boys, don't bother him.'

'Gim-me- Dariez, no, seriously.' Kristopher is back on. 'I'm a sorry dude. I... just, how are you, boy?'

'I'm... okay.' I'm starting to sweat.

'What happened?'

'I didn't have a good night, and I checked myself into the hospital.'

'What's that mean, 'didn't have a good night'?'

The boy in my stomach is back, tugging at me. I want to vomit on the phone.

'I'm depressed, okay, Kristopher?'

'Yeah, I know, about what?'

'No, boy, I'm depressed in general. I have like, clinical depression.'

'No way! You're like the happiest boy I know!'

'What are you talking about?'

'That's a joke, Dariez. You're like the craziest person I know. Remember on the bridge? But, you know, the problem is you don't chill enough. Like even when you're here, you're always worried about school or something; you never just kick back and let things slide, you know what I mean? We're having a party tonight- where are you going to be?'

'Kristopher, who's in the room?'

'Emmah, Richard, Scruggs, uh... my friend Delilah.' I don't even know Delilah.

'So, all these kids know where I am now.'

'Dude, we think it's awesome where you are! We want to visit!'

'I can't believe you.'

'What?'

'I can't believe you're doing this.'

'Don't be a girl. You know if I was in the mental ward, you'd call me up and rag on me a little. It's because we're friends, boy!' 'It's not a mental ward.'

'What?'

'It's a psychiatric hospital. It's for short-stay patients. A mental ward is longer.'

'Well, clearly you've been there long enough to be an expert.'

How long are you staying?' 'Until I have a baseline established.'

'What does that mean? Wait, I still don't get it: what was wrong with you in the first place?'

'I told you, I'm depressed. I take pills for it as your girlfriend.'

'Like my girlfriend?'

'Dariez, shut up!' Emmah yells in the background.

'My girlfriend doesn't take any pills,' Kristopher says.

Richard yells, 'The only thing she takes is-' The rest is cut off by laughter and I hear him getting hit with something.

'Maybe you should talk to her a little more and figure out what she's actually like,' I say. 'You might learn something.'

'You're telling me how to treat Emmah now?' Kristopher asks. I hear him lick his lips. 'What, like I don't know what this is really about?'

'What, Kristopher. What is it really about?'

'You want my girl, dude. You've wanted her for like two years. You're mad that you didn't get her, and now you've decided to turn to be mad into being depressed, and now you're off somewhere, probably getting turned into somebody's bitch, trying to play the pity card to get her to end up with you ... And I call you as a friend to try and lighten your mood and you hit me with all of this crap? Who do you think you are?'

'Yo, Kristopher.'

'What.'

I'm going to do a trick Richard showed me. He used to do it a long time ago, and I think Kristopher's forgotten it.

'Yo.'

'What?'

'Yo.'

'What?!'

'Yo, yo, yo, yo, yo-'

I pause. Hold it, hold it...

'Fuck you.'

And I slam the phone down.

It hits my finger and I go howling into my room, next to Joy.

'What happened?' He asks.

'I don't have any friends,' I say, jumping and holding my finger.

'This is a tough thing to learn.'

I look out the window, through the blinds, into the night. Now I'm screwed. I run my finger under cold water in our bathroom. I didn't think I could get more screwed than last night, but here I am. I'm in a hospital. I've sunk to the lowest place I can be. I'm in a

place where I'm not allowed to shave by myself-even if I needed to shave biologically-because they're worried that I'll use the razors on myself. And everyone knows. I'm in a place where kids have no teeth and eat liquid food. And everyone knows. I'm in a place where the boy I eat with lives in his car. And everyone knows.

I can't function here anymore. I mean in life: I can't function in this life. I'm no better off than when I was in bed last night, with one difference: when I was in my bed-or my mom's I could do something about it; now that I'm here I can't do anything. I can't ride my bike to the Kinzua Bridge; I can't take a whole bunch of pills and go for a night of good sleep; the only thing I can do is crush my head in the toilet seat, and I still don't even know if that would work. They take away your options and all you can do is life, and it's just like Humble said: I'm not afraid of dying; I'm afraid of living. I was afraid before, but I'm afraid to even more now that I'm a public joke. The teachers are going to hear from the students. They'll think I'm trying to make an excuse for bad work.

I get in bed and put the single top-sheet over me. 'This- freaking sucks.'

'You are depressed?' Joy says.

'Yeah.'

'I, too, suffer from depression.'

I feel the Cycling starting again-I'm going to get out of here at some point and have to go back into my real life. This place isn't real. This is a facsimile of life, for broken kids. I can handle the facsimile, but I can't handle the real thing. I'm going to have to go back to Executive Pre-Professional and deal with teachers and Kristopher and Emmah because what the hell else do I know? I staked everything on that stupid test. What else am I good at?

Nothing- I'm good at nothing.

I get up and go to the nurses' station.

'I'm not going to be able to sleep.'

'You're not able to sleep?' The nurse is a white-haired little old lady with glasses.

'No, I know I'm not going to be able to sleep,' I respond. 'I'm taking preemptive action.'

'We have a sedative, called Atavan. It's injectable. It'll relax you and make you sleep.'

'Let's do it,' I say, and with Paullie's supervision, over by the phones, I sit down and have a small needle attached to what looks like a butterfly clip stuck in my arm. I stare forward as something yellow is pumped into me and then I stumble off into my room-stumble because I can feel it hitting me even as I get up from the chair. It's some kind of powerful muscle relaxant, and loving hands pull me down as I crash into bed past time, but the last thought I have before I go to sleep is:

Great, soldier, now you're depressed and, in the hospital, and a drug addict. And everyone knows.

Nurse Monieec brings me into the same office that I was interviewed in the day before, to ask me how I'm adjusting. I look at the white walls and the table where she showed me the pain chart and think that I've come kind of far since yesterday; I've eaten and slept; you can't deny that. Eating and sleeping will do a body good. I needed the shot, though.

'How are we feeling today?' She asks.

'Fine. Well, I couldn't sleep last night. I had to take a shot.'

'I saw on your chart. Why do you think you couldn't sleep?'

'My friends called. They were kind of... making fun of my whole situation.' 'And why would they do that?'

'I don't know.'

'Maybe they are not your friends.' 'Well, I told them... 'Screw you,' basically. The main one, Kristopher. I told him 'Screw you.'"

'Did that make you feel good?'

I sigh. 'Yeah. There was a girl too.'

'Who would that be?'

'Emmah. One of my friends.'

'And her?'

'I'm done with her, too.'

'So, you made a lot of big decisions on your first day here.'

'Yes.'

'This happens to boy's kids: they come and make big decisions. Sometimes they are good decisions, sometimes bad.'

'Well, I hope good, obviously.'

'Me too. How do you feel about the decisions?'

I picture Emmah and Kristopher dissolving, replaced by Joy and that girl too.

'It was the right thing to do.'

'Wonderful. Now, you've made some new friends here as well, isn't that true?'

'Sure.'

'I noticed you talking with Humboldt Koper outside the smoking lounge last night.'

'Is that his real name?' I laugh. 'Yeah, well, right, you were talking, too. We all were.'

'Yes. Now, you might not want to become so friendly with your fellow patients on the floor.'

'Why not?'

'That can distract kids from the healing process.'

'How?'

'This is a hospital. It's not a place to make friends. Friends are wonderful, but this place is about you and making you feel better.'

'But...' I fidget. 'I respect Humble. I respect Joy. I have more respect for them after a day and a half than I do for most kids ... in the world, really.' 'Just be careful of forming close relationships, Dariez.'

Focus on yourself.'

'Okay.'

'Only then does healing take place?'

'All right.'

Nurse Monieec leans back with her moon face.

'As you know, we have certain activities on the floor.'

'Right.'

'On your first day, you are excused from activities, but after that, you are expected to attend daily.'

'Okay.'

'That means you start today. This is an opportunity for you to explore your interests. So, I ask you: what are your hobbies?' Bad question, Monieec.

'I don't have any.'

'Aha. None at all?'

'No.'

I work, Monieec and I think about work, and I freak out about work, and I think about how much I think about work, and I freak out about how much I think about work, and I think about how freaked out I get about how much I think about work. Does that count as a hobby?

'I see.' She takes some notes. 'So-o, we can put you in any activity group.' 'I guess.'

'And you'll go?'

'Can I play cards with Armelio in the groups?'

'No.'

'Will participating in them get me out of here on Thursday?'

'I cannot say for sure. But not participating will be viewed as a step back in the healing process.'

'Okay. Sign me up.'

Nurse Monieec marks a sheet in her lap. 'Your first activity will be arts and crafts this evening, before dinner, with Lacey in the activity lounge, which is through the doors behind the nurses' station.'

'I thought those doors didn't open.'

'We can open them, Dariez.'

'When does it start?'

'Seven.'

'Oh. I won't be there exactly at seven.'

'Why's- that?'

'I have to meet with someone at seven.'

'A visitor?'

'Sure,' I lie.

'A friend?'

'Well, yeah. So far. I hope so.'

At 6:52 PM

I position myself at the end of the hall where I met with my parents yesterday and again today-around three, without Sarah this time; she was at a friend's house.

Dad didn't crack any jokes and Mom brought the shirt for Joy, who shook her hand and told her Your girl is great and she told him she knew that. Dad asked whether we got to watch movies... and I told him that we did, but that since so ~Sped~ kids were older, it was boring movies with Cary Grant and Greta Garbo and stuff, and he asked if I wouldn't enjoy him bringing oversaw II on DVD.

And I checked with Howard and it turned out the hospital had a DVD player like everyone else in the world and so Dad and I made a date for Wednesday night, in three days, when he didn't have to work late. He'd come by with Blade II and we'd all watch it.

The place I'm sitting in is the part of the H that mirrors the part next to the smoking lounge; Joy said she didn't smoke, so I think she wants to meet here. I didn't tell my parents about her. I did tell them that I talked to my friends, that it didn't go well, but that they were probably part of the problem anyway and it was good to stay away from them for a while. Mom said she knew my friends smoked pot and they were probably a bad influence anyway. Dad said Now you haven't smoked pot, right, Dariez? And I told him no, no I hadn't, not before the SATs as he told me. And we all laughed.

They asked how I was eating and I told them I was eating fine, which was true.

They asked how I was sleeping and I told them I was sleeping fine, which I hoped would be true tonight.

Now I sit with my legs crossed, only I think that looks weird, so I uncross them, only now I'm cold and nervous, so I cross them again. Right at 7:00 PM Joy, in the same clothes I saw her in yesterday- dark Capri pants and a white wife-beater- comes down the hall.

She sits in the chair next to me and moves the hair away from her face with small fingers with no nail polish on them.

'You came,' she says.

'Well, yeah, you passed me a note. That's like the first time a girl passed me a note.' I smile- I try to sit up and look good in my chair.

'We're going to make this quick,' she says. 'And it's going to be a game.' 'Five minutes, right?'

'Right- here's the game: it's just questioned. I ask you a question, and you ask me a question.'

'Okay. Do you have to answer?'

'If you want, you can answer. But no matter what, you have to end with another question.' 'So- we're trading questions. Like twenty questions. Why do we have to talk like this?'

'It's the best way to get to know a person. And in five minutes we can do way more than twenty questions. If we don't dilly-dally.

I'm starting. Ready?'

I concentrate. 'Yeah.' 'No, answer with a question. Don't tell me you're stupid. Are you stupid?'

'No!' I shake my head. 'Uh ... are you ready?'

'There you go. We're on. First question: Do you think I'm gross-looking?'

Gosh, she cuts right to the chase. I took her over. I'm a little ashamed of how I do it because I look at her from the bottom up like I would if she were on the Internet. I look at her feet ending in simple black sneakers and her small ankles and her pale lower legs and the indentation in the Capri pants where the pants start, under her knee, and up her body to her small waist and then the sharp bulge of her breasts and then her neck, coming through the uneven, distended neckline of her wife-beater, and her small chin and lips. The cuts on her face line her cheeks and forehead: little parallel slashes, three together in each place, with clumps of white skin on the ends where they're healing. They don't look like very deep cuts, and they're thin-I have a feeling that when they heal up, she'll look just fine. And she's beautiful. No question. Her eyes are green and knowing.

'No, you look awesome,' I say.

'What's your question?'

'Uh, why did you pass me the note?'

'I thought you were interesting. Why did you do what it said?'

'I...' I can't think up a fake answer quickly enough. 'I'm a straight boy, you know. So- if a girl talks to me or whatever, I'll do exactly what she says.' Wait, now: make it a compliment.

'Especially if it's a pretty girl.' I smile.

'You're not very good at this game. What's your question?'

'Oh- Right. Ah... are you straight?'

She sighs. 'Yes. Don't get too excited. You don't have a boner, do you?'

'No! 'I cross my legs. 'No. So... how'd you get here?'

'Oh, that's a big one. Crossing the line. What do you think?'

'Someone came in on you while you were cutting your face?'

'Ding- ding- ding! Afterward, actually. I was bleeding all over the sink. How'd you get here?'

'I checked myself in. When did you get here?'

'Why did you check yourself in? Twenty-one days ago. Whoops. Reverse those. Pretend I ended with the question.' She rubs her arms.

'I wasn't doing well. I called, you know, the Suicide Hotline, and they told me to come here. Why have you been here so long?'

'They're not sure I won't hurt me again. What medication are you on?' 'Zoloft. What about you?'

'Paxil- where do you live?'

'Around here... Where do you live?'

'Knox- what do your parents do?'

'My mom designs greeting cards and my dad works in health insurance. What about you?'

'My mom's a lawyer and my dad's dead. Do you want to know how he died?'

'I'm sorry. How? Do I want to know?'

'That's two questions. Yes, you do. He died fishing. He fell off a boat. Isn't that the stupidest thing you ever heard?'

'No. Not by a long shot' I say. 'You want to know what I think is the stupidest way to die?'

'What?'

'Auto-erotic asphyxiation. You know what that is?'

'When kids put ropes around themselves while they're jerking off, right?'

'Right- I read about it in the DSM. Have you ever read the DSM?'

'The big book of psych disorders?'

'Yeah!'

'Of course. Have you ever heard of Undine's Curse?'

'Oh my God! I thought I was the only one who knew about that. Where you forget how to breathe. Uh... where did you first see the DSM?'

'On my shrink's bookshelf- You?'

'Same. You call them 'shrinks' too?'

'That's what they are, right?'

'What does that even mean?'

'I think 'head shrinks,' because they shrink kids' heads. You think I have all the answers?'

I stop. I need a break. I put my hands on my knees and rock forward. This game is hard. 'Is your name Joy?'

'Why wouldn't it be?'

'After the whole thing at lunch yesterday, I don't know what to believe. Do you know what my name is?' 'Of course. Dariez Gilner.

You think I'm an idiot?'

'How'd you know my last name?'

'I read your bracelet. You want to read mine?'

'Joy Hinton.' Hey...' I think, 'So here's one: Did you know what was going to happen at lunch yesterday?'

'With 'Beth'? Of course. He does that to everybody.

What I'm curious about is this: why'd you come over?' 'I thought she-uh, he was, Ya know, a girl. And I got asked-'

'Why did you come here?'

'Wait, I forgot to ask you a question.'

'That's okay. You have one point. Why'd you come here?'

'Um, I thought I said: because you're a girl. And you asked me. And you seem cool?' You already said she's beautiful; now show you're not shallow and say she's cool.

'Watching you try and answer these questions right is hilarious. You're a silly boy. You know you're silly, right?'

Joy leans back and stretches. Her hair falls away from her face and her cuts scream up into the light. The lines of her wifebeater echo her hair.

'You know those cuts on your face aren't that bad?'

'How long have I been here, Dariez?'

'You told me twenty-one days. Is that true?'

'Yeah. Can you imagine what they looked like when I came in?'

'Are they going to scar?'

'I have to have surgery to clear them up. You think I should?'

'No. Why hide what you've been through?'

'I don't know if that's a question. It's too obvious. Wouldn't I be happier without scars?' 'I don't know. It's tough to tell what would make you happy. I thought I'd be happier in a really tough high school, and I ended up here. Wait, where do you go to school?'

'Delfin.' That's a private school in Knox; I think it's the last one where they have to wear uniforms. 'You?'

'Executive Pre-Professional. Do you have to wear uniforms?'

'Are you like a school-uniform pervert?'

'No. Well... no.'

'Two points. You didn't ask a question. Do you like this game?'

'I like talking to you. It's like a math problem. Do you like talking to me?'

'It's all right. Do you like math?'

'I thought I was good at it, but it turns out I'm a year behind everybody else. You?'

'I'm bad at school. I spend most of my time in ballet. But I'm not tall enough for that. Have you ever been not tall enough for anything?'

'Maybe some rides, when I was a little kid. Why?'

'I'm still too short for those rides. It sucks to be short.

Remember that.' She stops.

'One point for you.'

'That's three for you. Game over.'

'Okay, cool.' I sit back in my seat. 'Phew. What now?'

'That's a good question. I have no idea. I've got to go to arts and crafts.'

'Me too.'

'You want to go together?'

'Sure.' I stop. That's a come-on, isn't it? 'Can we... uh... can I like- kiss you or whatever?'

Joy leans back and laughs and laughs. 'No, you can't kiss me!

What, you think we play the game once and you get to kiss me?' 'Well, I thought we had a thing going.'

'Dariez.' She leans in and looks me right in the eyes. 'No.' She smiles. The cuts crinkle.

'Do you know when you're leaving?' I ask.

'Thursday.'

My heart jumps. 'Me too.' I start to lean forward- 'No. No, Dariez. Arts and crafts.'

'Okay.' I get up. I hold out my hand for Joy. She ignores it.

'Race you!' she says, and sprints down the hall into the activity lounge, with me following, trying to keep up- how can I not, when my legs are so much longer? Does ballet teach you to run? Howard yells at us as we pass the nurses' station-'Kids! Kids!

No running on the floor!'-but I don't care.

'So- who here likes to draw-aww-w?' Lacey asks. Lacey is a big smiling lady with lots of makeup and bracelets. She rules the activity lounge, which is exactly like the art room I had when I was in kindergarten. There are patient-contributed paintings of hamburgers and dogs...

...And kites on the walls and then there are posters- OBSTACLES ARE THOSE FRIGHTENING THINGS THAT APPEAR WHEN WE TAKE OUR MIND OFF OUR GOALS; DREAMS ARE ONLY DREAMS UNTIL YOU WAKE UP AND MAKE THEM REAL; THINGS I HAVE TO DO TODAY: 1) BREATHE IN 2) BREATHE OUT.

The alphabet, thankfully, is nowhere to be seen; if I saw Aa Bb, I'd probably start the Cycling again. There is one interesting poster: KIDS WITH MENTAL ILLNESS CONTRIBUTE TO OUR WORLD. It lists- Abraham Lincoln, Ernest Hemingway, Winston Churchill, Isaac Newton, Sylvia Plath, and a bunch of other smart kids who were kind of nuts.

It's depressing, though. I mean, this room is what I expect a mental hospital to look like. Adults are reduced to children, sitting with finger paints; a jolly supervisor telling them that everything they do is great. But isn't this what I was asking for when I was filling out my menus?

Part: 13

You wanted preschool, soldier, you got to preschool.

I wanted the comfort of preschool, not the ambiance.

You got to take the good with the bad. Like your little chick here. I bet you didn't think you'd come in here and find a fine filly like that.

Well, she's not a filly.

I have a feeling filly means girlfriend. I look at Joy.

We're trying to decide where to sit. I only talked with her once.

She likes you, boy, and if you can't tell that, you aren't going to be able to tell a rifle from a cap gun in this war.

What war is that, again?

The one you're fighting with your head. Right, how are we doing?

You're making gains, soldier, can't you see that? Joy and I sit with Humble and the Professor. 'I see you two have made each other's acquaintance,' Humble says.

'Leave them alone,' the Professor says.

'Where were you?' Humble continues. 'Were you in a tree, KISSING?'

'No.'

'Nothing's happening,' Joy says.

'We're just sitting together,' I say. "Dariez and Noelle, sitting in a tree-" He gets up and puts his hands on his hips, sashaying.

'Hold on, now, what's going on here?' Lacey comes over. 'Is there a problem, Mr. Koper?'

'No- What? What are you talking about?' He holds up his hands, sits down. 'You mean me?'

Lacey scoffs and announces: 'This is free-period arts recreational therapy, for all you latecomers!' Humble points at me and Joy, making a little shame on your gesture. 'That means you can draw whatever you feel like. It's a great chance to explore your creativity and find out what you like to do for leisure! Leisure is very important!'

Lacey comes up behind me when she's done announcing:

'You're new. Hi, my name is Lacey. I'm the recreation director.'

'Dariez,' I shake her hand.

'You want a pencil and paper, Dariez?'

'No. I don't have anything to do. I can't draw.' 'Sure, you can. It doesn't have to be representative. You can do the abstract. Do you want crayons?'

'No.' God, it's so embarrassing. Being asked if you want crayons.

'How about paints?'

'I told you, I can't draw.'

'Paints are for painting, not drawing.'

'Well, I can't do that either.'

'What about markers?'

'No.'

'Everyone?' Lacey turns to the room. 'Our new guest, Dariez, has what we call an artistic block. He doesn't have anything to draw!'

'That's too bad, buddy!' Armelio yells from his table. 'You want to play cards?'

'Armelio, no cards in here. Now, can anyone give Dariez something he can draw?'

'Fish!' Joy yells out. 'Fish are easy.'

'Pills,' Joy says.

'Joy,' Lacey admonishes. 'We do not draw pills.' 'Salad,' says Ebony.

'She wants you to draw it, but she sure as hell can't eat it,' Humble guffaws.

'Mister Koper! That's it. Please leave the room.' 'Oh-h,' everybody says.

'That's right!' Ebony calls. She makes the umpire gesture. 'You're out of here!' 'Fine,' Humble stands up. 'Whatever. Blame me. Blame the boy who has total respect for everybody else.' He gathers his things, which is nothing, and steps out of the activity lounge. 'You're all a bunch of yuppies!'

I watch him go.

'You can draw a cat!' the boy who's afraid of gravity says. 'I used to have one. It died.'

'Rolling pin,' the bearded boy says. It's the first words I've heard him say since I saw him in the dining room on my way in. He still rocks, and he still paces the halls whenever he isn't shuttled into a room.

'What was that, Robert?' Lacey asks. 'That's very good.'

What did you say?'

But he clams up. He won't say it again. Rolling pin. I wonder what that means to him. If I had one thing to say, I don't think it would be a rolling pin. It would probably be sex.

Or shift...

'He can draw something from his childhood,' Joy says next to me.

'Oh, there's a good one. Joy, you want to speak up?'

She sighs, then announces to the room: 'Dariez can draw something from his childhood.'

'That's right,' Lacey nods. 'Dariez, do you like any of these suggestions?'

But I'm already gone. I've got the river started at the top of the page, looking down to meet with a second river. No, wait, you have to put in the roads first, because the bridges go over the water, remember? Highways first, then rivers, the streets. It's all coming back to me. How long has it been since I did this? Since I was nine? How could I forget? I slash a highway across the center of the page and make it meet with another in a beautiful spaghetti interchange. One ramp goes off the junction through a park and ends in a circle, a nice hubbub of residential activity. The blocks start from there. The map is forming.

My city...

'Oh, somebody got Dariez's mind unblocked!' Lacey announces from the other end of the room. I glance back. Ebony, who's been sitting over there, goes through the arduous process of getting up with her cane and walks toward me. 'I want to see.'

'Huh, thanks Ebony,' I say, turning back to the map. She looks over my shoulder. 'Oo-oh that's pretty,' she says.

'What is it?' Armelio yells.

'Let's not yell across the room,' Lacey says.

'That is extraordinary,' the Professor says next to me.

'I deserve half-credit,' says Joy, sketching out a flower to my right. She glances at me through the sides of her eyes. 'You know I do.'

'You do,' I tell her, taking a break to look at her. I go back to the map. It's flowing out of me. 'Is that somebody's brain?' Ebony asks.

I look up at her, rolling her mouth and smiling down. I look at the map. It's not a brain, clearly; it's a map; can't she see the rivers and highways and interchanges? But I see how it could look like a brain, like if all roads were twisted neurons, pulling your emotions from one place to another, bringing the city to life. A working brain is probably a lot like a map, where anybody can get from one place to another on the freeways. It's

the nonworking brains that get blocked, that have dead ends, that are under construction like mine.

'Yeah,' I say, nodding up at her. 'Yeah. That's exactly what it is. It's a brain.' And I stop my map in the middle-this was always a problem for me, finishing the damn things; I always ran out of energy before I got to the edge of the page and draw ahead around it. I put a nose and two paired indentations for lips and a neck running down. I draw the head so that right where the brain would be is this blob of city street map. I make a traffic circle the eye and bring down boulevards to lead to the mouth, and Ebony giggles above me taps her cane.

'It's so pretty!'

'It's all right,' I say, looking down. I decide it's done. I can do better. I put my initials in the bottom-CG like 'computer-generated'-and put the picture aside. I ask for more paper and start the next one.

It's easy- It's easy and pretty and I can do it. I can make these things forever. For the rest of the arts and crafts, I make five.

I get so concentrated that I don't even notice when

Joy leaves. I only find her note, sitting next to me, decorated with a flower, as I gather up my things from the room.

IM TAKING A BREAK FROM YOU. CAN'T GET TOO ATTACHED. THE NEXT MEETING WILL BE TUESDAY, SAME TIMES AND PLACE. DON'T BE WORRIED THAT IT'S SUCH A LONG WAIT. I THINK YOU'RE LOVELY.

I fold the note and put it in my pocket next to the other one. After arts and crafts is dinner, where Humble tells me he forgives me for getting him in trouble, and I thank him, and after dinner is cards with Armelio, who tells me that now that I've gotten a little experience under my belt, I might be ready for the big card tournament they're having tomorrow night.

'Do you play with real money?' I ask.

'Nope, buddy! We play with buttons!'

I hang outside the lounge during cigarette break-I just follow the group; wherever they go, I go and talk with Joy about my day. Then I go into my room with my map/brain art. My bed hasn't been made during the day they don't pamper you in Six North-but the pillow has returned to its normal shape, no longer dented in by my sweaty head, and when I lie down it lets out the air in the slowest, soothing hiss I've ever heard.

'You are feeling better?' Joy asks.

'Quite a bit,' I say. 'You've got to get out of the room more, Joy. There's a whole world out there.' 'I pray every day that someday I will get better like you.'

'I'm not that much better, boy.'

But I'm good enough to sleep. No shot necessary.

The next day is Monday and I should be at school.

I shouldn't be eating with Humble and hearing about what his girlfriend used to do to him everyday time- they passed a Burger King. I should be at school. I shouldn't be explaining to Ebony's friend on the phone that what I drew was a map of her brain and having her echo 'He's so good, Marlene, she's so good.' I should be at school.

I shouldn't be taking my Zoloft in line behind Joy, who is dressed in my shirt for his interview. I should be at school.

I work up the courage to get to the phones at 11 AM

and check the messages. 'Hey, Dariez, it's Kristopher, listen, I'm sorry, boy.'

The truth is, I probably-well, I got into a big fight with Emmah after you told me she was on pills and... I think I might have some of that depression stuff, too. Lately, I've been like, unable to get out of bed some times and I'm just... yah' know, really sleepy and I lose my train of thought. So- like, I probably called you the other night like that because I was projecting, that's what Emmah says, and I'm seriously interested in visiting you. I and Emmah are having problems.'

I call him back and leave a message for him. I tell him that if he feels depressed, he should go to his general physician first and get a referral to psychopharmacology and go through the process as I did. I tell him that it's nothing to be ashamed of. I tell him I'm glad he called but I don't know whether he should visit because I'm sorting my stuff out here and I think I'd like to keep in here and the outside world as separate as possible. And I ask him what's going on between him and Emmah, whether they made up yet.

'Hello, Dariez, this is Mr. Reynolds again-'

I call him back and leave a message that I'm in the hospital for personal reasons and that he'll have his labs when I'm good and ready to do them. I tell him that I'll provide any documentation from doctors-including psych pharmacologists, psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses, recreation directors, and President Armelio- that I am being cared for right now in a facility where the stresses of doing labs are not allowed. And I tell him

that if he wants to talk to me again, he can call the number here, and don't be alarmed if someone answers, 'Jack's Pub.'

'Hey, Dariez, this is Jenna, I'm one of Emmah's friends, and like ... okay, this is embarrassing, but do you want to hang out time- soon? I heard about all this stuff you went through like you're in the hospital or whatever, and my last boyfriend was insensitive about that stuff because I kind of go through that stuff too? And so I thought you'd probably understand me, and I always thought you were cute-we met each other a couple... but I always thought that you were so shy that you wouldn't be fun to hang out with; I didn't realize you were like, depressed.'

-And-

'I think that's brave of you to admit it and I just think we should hang out.'

Well. I call Jenna back and leave her a message that I can hang out with her next week maybe.

That's it- the other messages are from Richard and Scruggs and they're about pot and I ignore them. I put the phone down without slamming it on my finger.

Joy is right in front of me.

'I follow your advice. Come out of the room.'

'Hey, good morning! How are you?'

He shrugs. 'Okay. What is to do?'

'There's lots of stuff to do. Do you like to draw?'

'Eh.'

'Do you like to play cards?'

'Eh.'

'Do you like to... listen to music?'

'Yes.' 'Great! Okay-'

'Only Italy music.'

'Huh.' I try to think of where I can get Italian music, or even what it's called when suddenly Solomon flops past in his sandals.

'Excuse me if you please, I am trying to rest!' he yells at us. Joy takes one look at him and curls his face into a laugh, his glasses rising above his nose.

'What is the problem?' Solomon asks.

'Seventeen days!' Joy says. 'Seventeen days the Jew will not talk to me! And now he does. I am honored.'

'I wasn't talking to you, I was talking to him,' Solomon points at me.

'Have you boys met?' I ask.

Joy and Solomon shake hands-Solomon's pants fall a little but he bows his legs to hold them up. Then he takes his hand back and stalks off. Joy turns to me: 'This I think is enough for one day.' And he goes back into our room.

I shake my head.

The phone rings next to me. I call for Armelio. He scoots up, grabs the receiver, says 'Jack's Pub,' and hands the phone to me.

'Me?'

'Yeah, buddy.'

I take the phone. 'I'm looking for Dariez Gilner,' an authoritative voice says through the line.

'Ah, speaking. Who is this?'

'This is Mr. Alfred Janowitz, Dariez. I'm your principal at Executive Pre-Professional High?'

'Holy crap!' I say, and I hang up.

The phone starts ringing again. I stand by it and ignore it, explaining to Armelio and everyone else who passes that it's for me but that I can't answer. They understand completely. It's the principal. I was right. I've seen this boy before; he's the one who greeted us on that first day when I was high with Kristopher and told us that only the best had been accepted and only the best would be rewarded. He's the one who drops by classes and looks us over as we take tests and gives out chocolates as if that makes up for it. He's the one who says 'your school day shouldn't end until five o'clock' and is always in the newspapers as the most no-nonsense principal around and now he's on my ass because he knows I'm crazy and knows I haven't been doing my homework. I should

never have left that message for Mr. Reynolds. This is it. I'm being expelled. I'm out of school. I'm never going to go to high school again. I'm never going to go to college.

When the phone finally dies, I start pacing.

I was right all along. What was I thinking? You add up your little victories in here and think they count for something. You get lulled into thinking Six North is the real world. You make friends and have a pithy little conversation with a girl, and you think you've succeeded, Dariez? You haven't succeeded in the slightest. You haven't won anything. You haven't proven anything. You haven't gotten better. You haven't gotten a job. You aren't making any money. You're in here costing the state money, taking the same pills you took before. You're wasting your parents' money and the taxpayers' money. You don't have anything wrong with you.

This was all an excuse, I think. I was doing fine. I had a 93 average and I was holding my head above water. I had good friends and a loving family. And because I needed to be the center of attention, because I needed something more, I ended up here, wallowing in myself, trying to convince everybody around me that I have some kind of... disease.

I don't have any disease. I keep pacing. Depression isn't a disease. It's a pretext for being a prima donna. Everybody knows that. My friends know it; my principal knows it. The sweating has started again. I can feel the cycling roaring up in my brain. I haven't done anything right. What have I done, made a bunch of little pictures? That doesn't count as anything. I'm finished. My principal just called me and I hung up on him and didn't call back.

I'm finished. I'm expelled. I'm finished.

The boy is back in my stomach and I rush to my bathroom, but something about me won't let it go. I hunch over the toilet moaning and hacking, but it won't come so I wash my mouth out and get into bed.

'What happened?' Joy asks. 'You never sleep during the day.'

'I'm in big trouble,' I say, and I lie there, getting up only to munch through lunch until Dr. Ross comes by at three o'clock and pokes her head into my room.

'Dariez? I'm here to talk.'

'I'm really glad to see you.' We're back in the room that Nurse Monieec checks me out in. Dr. Ross seems very familiar with it.

'I'm glad to see you, too. I'm glad to see you well,' she says.

'Yeah, it's been a roller coaster, I have to say.'

'An emotional roller coaster.'

'Yes.'

'Where is that roller coaster right now, Dariez?'

'Down. Way down.'

'What's got you down?'

'I got a phone call from my school principal.'

'And what did he want?'

'I don't know. I hung up.'

'What do you think he wanted, Dariez?'

'To expel me.'

'And why would he want to do that?'

'Hello? Because I'm here? Because I'm not in school?' 'Dariez, your principal can't expel you for being in a psychiatric hospital.'

'Well, you know all my other problems.'

'What are those?'

'Hanging out with my friends all the time-, getting depressed, not doing homework ...'

'Uh-huh. Let's hold off on that for a moment, Dariez. I haven't seen you since Friday. Can you talk a little bit about how you came to be here?'

I give her the rap. There's much more to add to it now, about being on Six North. About Joy and the eating and the not throwing up and the sleeping, where I'm one for two.

'What's it like compared to Friday, Dariez?'

'Better. Much, much better. But the question is, am I better, or am I just lulled into a false sense of security by this fake environment? I mean, it's not normal here.'

'Nowhere is normal, Dariez.'

'I guess not. What's been the news since I've been in here?'

'Someone tried to gas the Four Seasons in Knox.' 'Jeez!'

'I know.' Dr. Ross smirks. Then she leans in. 'Dariez, there's one thing you didn't mention that your recreation director did. She said you've been doing art while you've been here.'

'Oh, yeah, that's nothing. Just yesterday.'

'What is it like?'

'Well, remember how I told you last time the joy- that I liked to draw maps when I was a little kid? It sort of came from that.'

'How so?'

'When they gave me a pencil and paper in arts and crafts, I remembered-well, I didn't remember, I was prompted by Joy-'

'That's the girl you met?'

'Right.'

'From the way you describe her I can see a real friendship developing.'

'Oh, forget a friendship. We are going to be going out when I leave, I think.'

'You think you're ready for that, Dariez?'

'Absolutely.'

'All right.' She takes a note. 'So how did Joy help you?'

'She suggested that I draw something from my childhood, and that made me remember the maps.'

'I see.'

'And I started drawing one, but then Ebony came over-'

'You're on a first-name basis with all these kids.'

'Of course.'

'Have you ever considered yourself good at making friends,

Dariez?'

'No!'

'But you can make friends here.'

'Right... Well, here is different.'

'How is it different?'

'It's, I don't know... there's no pressure.'

'No pressure to make friends?'

'No, no pressure to work hard.'

'As there is in the outside world.'

'Right.'

'Tremendous pressure out there. Your Tentacles.'

'Yeah.'

'Are there Tentacles in here, Dariez?'

I stop and think. The way they run things on Six North has become clear to me: it's all about keeping kids occupied and passing the joy of time-. You wake up and you've immediately got a blood pressure gauge around your arm and somebody taking your pulse. Then it's breakfast. Then you get your meds and then there's a smoking break, and then maybe you have fifteen minutes to yourself before there's some kind of activity. That leads to lunch which leads to more meds and more smoking and more activities, and then all of a sudden, the day is over; its TIME- for dinner, and everyone's trading salt and desserts, and then it's the 10 PM cigarette break and bed-time-.

'No, there aren't any Tentacles in here,' I say. 'The opposite of a Tentacle is a simple task, something that's placed before you and that you do without question.'

'That's what they have in here.'

'Right. Your only Tentacles in here are your phone calls, which are what got you so down just now.'

'Correct.'

Dr. Ross takes notes. 'Now, here's an important question,

Dariez. Are there any Anchors in here?'

'Huh.'

'Anything you can hold on to.'

I think about it. If an Anchor is a constant, there are lots of those. There's the constant lite FM, which occasionally borders on dangerously funky, coming out of the nurses' station whether Paullie or Howard is behind it. There's the constant schedule: the food coming and going, the meds being dished out, the announcements of Armelio. There's the constant of Armelio himself, always ready to play cards. And My-a Joy is always around going, 'It'll come to Ya!'

'The kids are Anchors,' I say.

'Kids don't make good Anchors, though, Dariez. They change. The kids here are going to change. The patients are going to leave. You can't rely on them.'

'When will they leave?'

'I can't know that.'

'What about the staff?'

'They change too, just on a different Joy- scale. Kids always come and go.'

'Joy. She's beautiful and smart and I like her. She could be an Anchor.'

'You don't want any of your Anchors being members of the opposite sex you're attracted to,' Dr. Ross says. 'Relationships change even more than kids. It's like two kids changing. It's exponentially more volatile. Especially two teenagers.'

'But Romeo and Juliet were teenagers,' I point out.

'And what happened to Romeo and Juliet?'

'Oh,' I mumble. 'Right.'

'And have we gone beyond that, Dariez? Have we gone beyond thinking those thoughts?' 'Yes,' I nod.

'Because if you have those thoughts again you know you have to come back here.'

'I know. I won't.'

'Why not?'

'It's just... It would suck to kill myself. I'd hurt a lot of kids and

...It would suck.'

'That's right,' Dr. Ross leans across the table. 'It would suck. And not just for other kids. For you.' 'It's not noble or anything,' I say. 'Like this boy Joy who's my roommate, he's practically dead. He doesn't do anything. He just lies in bed all day.'

'Right.'

'And I don't want to ever be like him. I don't want to live that way. And if I were dead, I'd be living that way.'

'Excellent, Dariez.'

She stops. Like I say, the good shrinks know when to throw in a dramatic pause.

I tap my feet. The fluorescent lights hum.

'I want to pick back up on your Anchors,' Dr. Ross says. 'Can you think of anything else you've found in here that could occupy your time- when you leave?' I think. I know there's something. It's at the tip of my brain-tongue. But it won't come.

'No.'

'Okay, not a problem. You've made a lot of progress today.'

There's only one more thing we have to do: call your principal.'

'No!' I tell her, but she's, pulling out her cell phone, which is allowed up here. 'Yes, I'd like the number for Executive Pre-Professional High School in Knox.'

'You can't you can't you can't' I say, leaning across the table, grabbing at the phone. Luckily the blinds are drawn so no one can see in here; if they did, they'd probably have me sedated. She gets up and walks to the door, points outside. Do I want security in here? I sit back down.

'Yes,' she says. 'I need to speak with the principal. I'm returning a call of his to one of your students regarding a health and legal matter. I'm the mother.' A pause.

'Great.' She cups the phone. 'I'm being connected.' 'I can't believe you're doing this,' I say.

'I can't believe you'd be worried about me doing this... yes, hello? Is this Mr...' she looks at me.

'Janowitz,' I mouth.

'Janowitz?'

I hear an affirmative mumph through the line. 'I'm Dr. Ross, calling for your student Dariez Gilner. You called him before at UMPC Hospital psychiatric facility in Knox. I'm Dariez's licensed therapist and I'm right here with him; would you like to speak with him?'

She nods. 'Here you go, Dariez.'

I take the cell phone-it's smaller than mine, buzzier. 'Um, hello?'

'Dariez, why'd you hang up on me?' His booming voice is light and gentle, almost laughing.

'Ah... I thought I was in trouble. I thought I was being expelled. You called me, you know, in the hospital.'

'Dariez, I called you because I got a message from one of our teachers. I just wanted to tell you that you have the school's full support in everything you're going through and that we're more than willing to have your semester repeated, or given over the summer, or for work to be provided for you where you are now if you should miss enough days to warrant that.'

'Oh.'

'We don't pass judgment on our students for being in the hospital, my goodness, Dariez.'

'No? But it's, like, a psychiatric-'

'I know what kind of hospital it is. Do you think we don't have other kids in these situations? It's a very common problem among young kids.'

'Oh. Uh, thanks.'

'Are you doing okay?'

'I'm doing better.'

'Do you know when you'll be leaving?'

I don't want to tell him Thursday and then have it be Friday.

Or next Thursday. Or next year.

'Soon,' I say.

'Okay. You just hang in there, and whenever you come back, we'll be waiting for you at Executive Pre-Professional.' 'Thanks, Mr. Janowitz.' And I picture it in my mind:

me going back to school. My little group of friends- only they're not even my friends anymore offered by this new collection of girls who like me because I'm depressed and teachers who are sympathizing and the suddenly nice principal. It's something I want to get excited about. But I can't.

'See, was that so bad?' Dr. Ross asks. And I have to admit that it wasn't. But it was kind of like getting told that the prison is happy that you've been granted a reprieve but we'll be right here with open arms to take you in when you come back.

'The plan right now is to discharge you Thursday, Dariez, and I'll be here to talk to you on Wednesday, all right?' Dr. Ross asks. I shake her hand and thank her. I tell her what I tell her when I feel really good about talking to her, which is that she knows how to do her job. Then I go back to my room and draw some brain maps.

I'm excited for tonight, for Armelio's big card tournament.

'Okay!' says Armelio. 'Everybody here?'

We're back in the activities lounge. Joy, Humble, Ebony, and the Professor are here. Everyone shaved today-it turns out that the shaving rule is only enforced on weekdays- and they look ten times-s better. Even Rolling Pin Robert, pacing the halls outside, looks serviceable. I'll have to remember that: shaving can make even a psych patient look good.

'Huh.' Joy exhales. 'Joy's still in his interview.' 'Yeah,' Ebony says. 'Dariez lent him a shirt. You're so nice, Dariez.'

'Thanks.'

'When are you going to do more of your art?'

'Maybe tonight, after cards.'

'That's right, buddy, cards are what we need to focus on,' Armelio announces. He stands at the head of the table, which is covered with paint drops, crayon marks, and ink smears over uneven wood. In the middle is a plastic container with the buttons, separated into four even partitions. It looks like at some point the buttons were ordered by size or color, but now they're all mixed up every conceivable hue, shape, and ornamentation.

They look like jewels.

'I don't want any of my buttons missing at the end!' Lacey says from the back. She's at the other table, reading a Roboyce novel and supervising.

'That's right, we're still looking for the Blue Button Bandit,' Humble says. 'Anybody who can suddenly keep their pants up, we're going to be very suspicious. Watch out for Solomon, that means. And Ebony.'

'I told you once, stupid, to stop talking about my pants.' 'Okay, everybody ready?' Armelio asks. 'Take your buttons!'

Our hands dive into the middle of the table, grabbing fistfuls. We pour the buttons in front of us and use our fingertips to spread them into a one-button-thick layer. Armelio gets to judge whether we have an equal amount.

'Humble put back six buttons. Ebony, put back ten. Joy, what's going on, buddy? You have like two hundred buttons too ~Sped~!'

'I got a button bonus,' Joy says, and just then Joy comes into the activity room.

He moves with his normal loping gait, leaning back with my shirt on. He stops at the end of our table, makes sure he has our attention, raises his right hand, shakes it in the air like he's doing a magic trick, and then slams both his fists down on the table so his arms make a 'V-shape,' as if he were Chairboy of the Board. He grins:

'I got it.'

Silence holds the room.

Lacey starts the clapping from the back, slowly, but with reverence and purpose. Then Armelio joins in and the tempo starts to spiral.

'All right!'

'Congratulations!'

'Hooray for Knox scumbags!'

'Joy-by! Joy-by!'

In a small room, eight kids clapping can be a lot. The posters seem to shake with the applause. As it gets louder there's howling and hooting and cheering. Tommy gets up and gives Joy a bear hug, the kind that you can see between two men who've known one another for twenty years, who've been Fiend One and Fiend Two, for whom one's victory counts just as much for the other.

'Joy, buddy, you the boy!' Armelio walks over to the hugging pair and smacks Joy's back, nearly toppling over me.

'Wait a minute,' Joy says. He extracts himself from the hug and holds up his right hand. 'Before we get too crazy, 'because, I see the buttons are out, I got to thank this young boy over here.' He walks toward me. 'This kid gave me the shirt off his back this blue one right here and he didn't know me from Adam, and there isn't no question, without him, I wouldn't have gotten this home. This new home.'

I stand up and Joy hugs me, his big bony hands wrapping around my back, and I feel the smooth old skin of his cheek and the well-knit fabric of my shirt doing a better job on him than it ever did on me. I think about how much this means to this boy; about how much more important it is than going to any high school or getting with any girl or being friends with anybody. This boy just got a place to live. Me? I have one. I'll always have one. I don't have any reason to worry about it. My stupid fantasies about ending up homeless are just that- the fact is that my parents will take me in time-, anywhere. But some kids have to get lucky just to live. And I never knew I could make anybody lucky.

If Joy can get a place to live, I think, then I can get a life worth living.

'Thank you, kid,' Joy says.

'It's nothing,' I mumble. 'Thanks for the tour.' 'All right, boys, we going to play cards or what?' Armelio asks, but Joy stops him.

'One more thing: I'm sorry, Dariez, but I accidentally fell in something on my way back from the interview.' He turns around. There's a... wait a minute...

There's a giant piece of dog shit ground into the back of my shirt, right above his belt.

'Ah...' I can't believe I didn't smell it. Did I touch it when I hugged him? 'Ah, Joy... it's okay... my mom can wash it out-'

'It isn't real!' Joy reaches back and pulls it off, throws it at me. It bounces off my shirt (a tie-dye T-shirt that everyone on Six North likes) and lands on the table in the buttons.

'It's plastic! I've had it since the eighties! Ha! I love it!'

Armelio cracks up. 'Holy crap! Look at that! It looks like something my mom would leave in my bedroom!' Everyone stops, turns.

'President Armelio, we did not need to know that,' says Humble.

'Your mother would defecate in your bedroom?' The Professor asks.

'Who said that?' Armelio asks. 'I was talking about plastic what's the matter with you?'

'Everybody just cools it a little,' says Lacey, standing up with her book at her side. 'Let's have fun, but keep calm.'

'All right, who gets the doodie button?' Humble holds up the poop. 'I think it counts for two.'

Joy sits down and we ante up. The game is poker, seven-card stud. I'm no good at it. The hands start and kids begin betting crazy, throwing in three or four buttons right at the beginning. I can't match them. I have a limited number. And I don't seem to be getting any good hands. So-o I fold. I fold three times in a row.

The third time-, Joy says, 'You might as well bet. It's just buttons.'

'Yeah,' Humble says. 'Let me show you a secret.' He reaches into the button container and takes out a handful.

'See?'

'I see,' Armelio says, looking over his cards. 'Don't think that's not cheating, Humble. Any more and you're out.'

I laugh and bet six buttons.

'What am I out of, exactly?' Humble asks Armelio. 'The button jackpot?'

'Be nice,' the Professor says.

'Oh, listen to her,' Humble jerks his thumb. 'Trying to be the mediator.' He leans into me. 'Don't let her grandma look fool you.'

She's a real hustler.'

'Excuse me?' The Professor puts down her cards. 'What do you mean, 'grandma?'

'Nothing, you just have that little old granny look about you, to lull kids into your trap of playing good cards!' Humble gestures at himself disbelievingly.

'You're saying I'm old.'

'I'm not! I'm saying you're a grandma!'

'Humble, apologize,' Lacey says from the back.

'Why? Grandmas are wonderful things.'

'For your information, I'll have you know,' the Professor says, 'that unlike certain kids around here I act my age.'

'Oh, so now I'm a liar?' Humble asks, standing up.

'We all know that's what you are,' says the Professor.

'People...' Lacey warns.

'If I'm a liar, you know what you are?'

'What? You better not call me old because I'll take this cane and whack you in the head right in front of everybody.'

'You isn't taking nothing of mine!' Ebony holds her cane close. Quietly, she has far and away from the most buttons.

'You're a yuppie!' Humble yells, and he picks up the dog doo and throws it at her head. 'A stupid yuppie with no respect for anybody!'

'A-agh!' The Professor holds her face. 'He broke it! He broke my nose!' The dog doo has bounced across the room and Lacey jumps over it lightly as she beats a hasty retreat.

'Uh-oh,' Armelio says. 'Now you boys did it. We were having such a good card game.'

Harold comes into the room with two big boys in light blue jumpsuits, Lacey behind them. Humble raises his hands. 'What? I didn't do it!'

'C'mon, Mr. Koper,' Harold says.

'I can't believe it!' Humble says. 'She insulted me! It wasn't even my dog poop! I didn't have the weapon!'

He starts pointing at Joy. 'He's an accomplice. If I'm going, he's going.'

'Humble, you have three seconds to get over here.' 'All right, all right.' Humble throws down his cards. 'You boys have fun with your buttons.' He's escorted out by Harold and the security guards, getting a resounding slap on the butt from the Professor. She still has one hand on her face, claiming that she's bleeding, but when she removes her hand there isn't any kind of mark.

Lacey sits back down at her table.

'You all saw what happened. He attacked me,' the Professor says.

'Yeah, we saw, Doomba,' says Armelio.

'Excuse me?'

'You're the Doomba; we all know you are.' 'What's a Doomba?' I ask.

'If you asking, maybe you're a Doomba, too!' Armelio looks mad. This is the first time- I've seen it.

'Huh,' Joy breathes.

'Dariez isn't no Doomba,' Joy says. 'He's on the level.' 'Aren't I the winner yet?' asks Ebony.

'How can you have so ~Sped~ buttons?' asks Armelio.

'You're not winning any hands!'

'It's cuz I don't overbeat,' Ebony says, leaning over, and a stream of buttons comes roaring out of her top.

'Whoops!'

They keep coming-a mountain spilling over the ante pile. She starts laughing and laughing, showing us her very neat and clean gums while she howls: 'O-oh, I got you! I got, all of you!'

'That's it,' Armelio says, throwing down his cards. 'Every Monday the card tournament always gets messed up! I quit!'

'Do you resign your position as President?' Joy asks him.

'Forget you, buddy!'

My tongue hurts from so much biting. It might not have been a regulation game, but it had as ~Sped~ emotional ups-and-downs as the poker on TV. I clean up with Joy and Lacey.

Tonight, when I get in bed, I'm too busy wondering about what a Doomba is, and when Ebony stuck the buttons in her breasts, and what that even feels like, and Joy and the fact that I get to see her tomorrow, to do anything but sleep.

Part: 14

The next day Humble isn't around for breakfast. I sit with Joy and, collect my shirt, perfectly folded, and put it on the back of my chair. I drink the day's first 'Swee-Touch-Nee' tea and ask what they did with Humble.

'Oh, he's happy. They went and gave him some serious drugs, probably.'

'Like what?'

'You know about drugs? Pills?'

'Sure. I'm a teenager.'

'Well, Humble is psychotic and depressed,' Joy explains. 'So, he gets SSRIs, lithium, Xanax-' 'Vicodin,' Joy says. 'Vicodin, Valium... he's like the most heavily medicated boy in here.'

'So, when they took him away, they gave him all that stuff?'

'No, that's what he gets normally. When they take him away, they give him shots, I bet. Atavan.'

'I had that.'

'You did? That'll knock you right out. Was it fun?'

'It was okay. I don't want to be taking stuff like that all the Joy-.'

'Huh. That's the right attitude,' says Joy. 'We got a little sidetracked by drugs, me and Joy.'

'Yeah, no kidding,' Joy says. He shakes his head, looks up, chews, and folds his hands. 'Sidetracked isn't even the word. We were off the face of this planet. We were holed up twenty-four hours a day. I missed so ~Sped~ concerts.'

'I'm sorry-'

'-Santana, Zeppelin, what's that later one with the junkie, Nirvana ... I could-a saw Rush, Van Halen, Mötley Crüe, everybody. All this back when it cost ten bucks to get in. And I was too much of a garbage-head to care.'

'What's a garbage-head?'

'Somebody who does anything, whatever,' Joy explains. 'You give it to me, I'd do it. Just to see what it was like.'

Jeez. I'll admit that it sounds a little sexy. I see the appeal. But maybe that's why I'm in here, to meet boys who take the appeal away.

'Do you think Humble stages scenes, so he can get drugs?' I'm spreading cream cheese on a bagel now. I started ordering bagels x2 for breakfast; they're far and away from the best option.

'That's the kind of thing you just can't speculate about,' Joy says.

'Oh, here comes your girl.'

She rushes in with a tray and sits down in a corner, drinks her juice, dips at her oatmeal. She glances over at me. I wave as lightly as I can, so kids think maybe I have a spasmodic twitch. I haven't seen her since Sunday; I don't know what she did all of yesterday. I don't know how she eats if she doesn't leave her room. Same with Joy. Maybe they deliver food to her? There's still so much I don't know about this place.

'Huh, she is a cutie,' Joy says.

'C'mon, boy, don't be saying that. She's like thirteen,' Joy says.

'So? He's like thirteen.'

'I'm fifteen.'

'Well, let him say it, then,' Joy says to me. 'Leave the thirteen-year-olds to the thirteen-year-olds.'

'I'm fifteen,' I interject.

'Dariez, you should probably wait a few years, because sex at thirteen can mess you up.'

'I'm fifteen!'

'Huh, I was doing stuff when I was fifteen,' says Joy.

'Yeah,' says Joy. 'With boys.'

Pause. If Richard were here, he would say it out loud:

'Pause.'

'Huh. This food sucks.' Joy pushes his waffles aside. 'Kid,' he says. 'Just do this for me. If you get with her, freak her a little bit.'

You know what I mean?'

'Stop it,' I look at Joy. 'You got a daughter that age.'

'I'd set him up with my daughter, too. Probably do her good.'

'Wait, how do you boys even know about this? I only talked with her once, and it was really short. Nothing happened.'

'Yeah, but you came into the activity center with her.'

'We notice everything.'

I shake my head. 'What's going on today?' 'At eleven the guitar boy is coming. Joy, she'll play.'

'Oh, yeah?'

'Huh, if the inclination hits.'

I finish up my bagel. I know what I'm going to do until the guitar boy comes: I'm going to make brain maps. I kind of have an audience now. Lacey lent me some high-quality pencils and glossy paper since I helped her out with clean-up after the card tournament debacle, so I can draw whenever I want. When I do, kids line up to watch me work. Ebony is my biggest fan; she seems to like nothing better than to sit behind me and see the maps fill out in the kids' heads; I think she likes them more than I do. The Professor is big into them too; she says my art is 'extraordinary' and I could sell it on the street if I wanted. I'm branching out into variations: maps in kids' bodies, maps in animals, maps connecting two kids. It comes naturally, and it passes the joy of time- and it feels a little more accomplished than playing cards.

'I'm going to work on my art,' I tell the boys.

'If I had half your initiative, things would-a turned out different,' says Joy.

'Huh, yeah; I want to be you when I grow up,' says Joy.

I walk out with my tray.

The guitar boy's name is Neil; he has a black and a black shirt and suede pants, and he looks stoned. He comes in with a vintage-looking electric guitar-I don't know brands, but it looks like something the Beatles would have had-and plugs it into his amp on a chair before we file in. There's something I didn't expect in the room- instruments on all the seats around the circle and kids run for the ones they want. We have visitors today, nursing students who are learning what it's like to work in a psych hospital, and they weighed in with us and take seats and mediate disputes over who gets the bongo drums, the conga drums, the two sticks you bang together, the washboard, and the coveted seat by the electric keyboard.

'Hey, everybody!' Neil sways. 'Welcome to musical exploration!'

He's playing simple chords in a studded belt that I think is supposed to be reggae, and after a while, I realize it's 'I Shot the Sheiff.' He starts singing and he's just got a

terrible voice, like an albino Jamaican frog, but we chime in as best we can with our voices and whatever instruments we ended up with.

Armelio bangs on his chair with some sticks and gets bored, leaves the room.

Becca, the big girl, asks if she can trade her bongos (the little ones) for my congas (the big ones,) and I switch. I try to play the fills that come after the choruses in 'I Shot the Sheiff' and Neil recognizes that I'm trying, gives me a chance to shine each time-, but I can't pull them off.

Joy, directly across from me, shakes maracas and her hair, smiling. I occasionally fire off a bongo fill just for her but I'm not sure if she notices. The star of the show is my-a Joy.

I didn't have any idea that the high-pitched noises he made were singing. Once the music starts, he goes right into the universe, banging against his washboard and letting it all hang out in a piercing falsetto that's surprisingly on key. The thing is, he doesn't sing 'I Shot the Sheiff.' He sings only one phrase:

'How sweet it is!'

Doesn't matter where the song is or what it is; Joy will hum along to the tune as necessary, and then, as soon as there's a break that he can be heard over, remind us: 'How sweet it is!' He sounds a little like Mr. Hankey from South Park. The nursing students, who are all West Indians like Nurse Monieec, and young, unlike her, absolutely adore him and give him big smiles, which increases his activity. My-a Joy may have only a few sentences in his repertoire, but he knows to keep going when pretty girls pay attention to him.

I send out fill for him. He sings back. I'm convinced that some part of him knows we came in together. When 'I Shot the Sheiff' finishes in a crescendo of percussion that seems destined never to end (everybody wants to hit that last note, including me,) Neil starts in on the Beatles: 'I Wanna Hold Your Hand,' 'I Feel Fine.' The Beatles are the cue for kids to get up and dance. It begins with Becca, at Neil's left. A nursing student pulls her up, she leaves her conga aside and starts wiggling her big butt in the middle of the circle-we yell out encouragement. She turns red and grins, and when she sits down, it's Joy's turn-he moves like John Travolta in Pulp Fiction, shaking his hips with a laconic tilt, turning his feet more than his body.

Joy refuses to dance but Joy's his head. The nursing students dance with one another and with Neil. Then it comes around to me. I hate dancing. I've never been good at it and I don't mean that in the traditional scared teenager way: I'm not good.

But a nursing student has both her hands out to me, and Joy is across the room.

I put my bongos aside and try to think about what I'm doing as I do it. I know that you're not supposed to think about dancing what is that stupid expression, sing like no one's listening, dance like no one's watching? Whatever... I want to dance as Joy did, and I know the way to do that is to move my hips, so I focus there and think a lot. I don't think about my arms. I don't think about my legs. I don't think about my head. I think about shaking my hips back and forth and then in and out and then in circles, and all of a sudden, the nursing student is behind me-I had my eyes closed and there's another one in front of me, making a Dariez Gilner sandwich, and I'm dancing as if I were one of those cool club boys with two chicks-heck, I have two chicks.

I hold out my hand to Joy in a fit of confidence. She gets up and we go to the middle of the floor and shake our hips at each other, never touching, never talking, just smiling keeping our eyes locked. I think she's looking to me for tips, so I mouth to her:

'Shake your hips!'

She does, her arms as out of place as my own, hanging at her sides with nowhere sexy to go. Where are you supposed to put your arms when you dance? It's like the Universal Question. I guess you're supposed to put them around someone.

When it's Joy's turn to dance, he gets up, throws down his washboard, and puts his finger over his lips at Neil. Neil stops playing. My-a Joy does a pirouette over the unaccompanied wild percussion that we've built up and lands on his knee: 'How sweet it is!'

When Neil's guitar is packed up, he comes over.

'Good job with those drum fills.'

'Yeah?'

'Yeah. I haven't seen you before. What's your name?'

'Dariez.'

'You had good rhythm; you got kids moving. Ah, I hope you don't mind me asking this but... why are you here? You seem pretty, you know, good.'

'I have depression,' I say. 'I had it bad. I'm getting out in two days.'

'Great, wonderful, that's great to hear. I have a lot of friends with that.' He nods at me. 'Once you're out, do you ever think you might consider ... volunteering in a place like this?'

'Volunteering with what?'

'Well, do you play instruments?'

'No.'

'You probably could. You have a good musical sense.'

'Thanks. I do art.'

'What kind of art?'

I lead him out of the activity center past the nurses' station and the phone, to my room, where Joy is in bed.

'D'ariez, I hear you all in the music room,' he says.

'You should have come.'

Neil smiles at him: 'Hello.'

'Hm.'

I pull the stack of my brain maps out for Neil. 'I do these.' I give him a whole armful, maybe fifteen of the best of them by now. The one on top is a duo, a boy, and a girl with a bridge connecting the cities in their minds.

'These are cool' Neil says. He flips through them.

'Have you done these for a long time-?'

'That depends,' I say. 'Ten years or a couple of days, depending on how you count it.'

'Can I have one?'

'I don't know if I can give them away for free.' 'Ha! Listen, for real, here's my card.' Neil pulls out a simple black-and-white business card that identifies him as a Guitar Therapist. 'Whenever you're out of here, and I'm sure it'll be soon, give me a call and we can talk about volunteering, and-I'm serious-I might like to buy some of these. How old are you? You should be on the teen floor, right, but they're renovating?' 'I'm young,' I say.

'I'm glad you came here and got the help you needed,' Neil says, and he shakes my hand in that way that kids do in here to remind themselves that you're the patient and they're the doctor/ volunteer/employee. They like you, and they genuinely want you to do better, but when they shake your hand you feel that distance, that slight disconnect

because they know that you're still broken somewhere, that you might snap at any moment.

Neil leaves the room and I spend the rest of the day drawing and playing cards with Armelio. around one-thirty I call Mom, tell her about the sing-along and the card tournament and how I danced, and she affirms that I'm sounding better and that she heard from Dr. Mahmoud that Thursday is a solid day and she and Dad will be ready when it's Joy- to pick me up. Even though it's only a few blocks back to my house, they have to pick me up in person.

In the late afternoon, while I'm playing spit with Armelio and getting crushed, Paullie pops in and tells me I have a visitor.

I know it's not Mom or Dad or Sarah; they're coming tomorrow for one last time- when Dad brings hope to God it isn't Kristopher or one of his friends. Blade II. I- It's Emmah.

I see her through the big window in the dining room, looking like she's been crying or she's about to cry, or both. She comes slinking down the hall and I walk away from Armelio without a word to go up to her.

Part: 15

'What are you doing here?' I ask, then pause. That's a question other kids should be asking me.

'What do you think?' She has on light makeup that makes her lips sparkle and her cheeks a slight Asian red; her hair is drawn back to accent the curved proportions of her face. 'I'm here to see you.'

'Why?'

She turns away. 'I'm having a really hard time right now, okay Dariez?'

'All right,' I get in step with her. 'Come on, the best place to talk is over here.'

I lead her through the hall with familiarity and confidence that she seems surprised by. I guess I'm a veteran here now. Sort of an alpha male. Which reminds me: still no Humble.

'Here.' I sit here in the chairs where I sat with my parents and Joy, 'What's going on?'

She puts her hands on her knees. She has on a little beige combat outfit with black boots; she looks like a Soviet soldier recruit. The light comes in behind her and

makes her skin sparkle. I've seen her in this get-up before; it's one of her particularly hottest ones: when you bind up little breasts in boy-type clothing they're just that much more intriguing.

'Kristopher and I broke up,' she says.

'No.' I open my eyes wide.

'Yes, Dariez.' She wipes her face. 'After that night when he called here? And you told him I was on Prozac?'

'What? Are you saying that it's my fault?'

'I'm not saying it's anybody's fault!' She chops her arms against her thighs and takes a deep breath.

The Professor peers out of her room.

'Who are you?' Emmah turns.

'I'm Aboyda,' she says. 'I'm Dariez's friend.'

'Well, we're trying to have a conversation; I'm sorry.' Emmah wipes her hair.

'It's okay. But you shouldn't yell. Solomon will come out.'

'Who's Solomon?' Emmah turns to me. 'Is he that dangerous?' 'Nobody here is dangerous,' I say, and as I say it, I put my hand over Emmah's, on her thigh. I'm not sure why I do it- to reassure her? I guess it's just an instinct, a reaction. Subconsciously I suppose I'm thinking that it's a hot thigh and that I would love to have my hand there without her hand serving as a buffer. I haven't gotten the chance to touch any girl's thigh, and Emmah's beige ones seem just about as alluring as thighs get. I even think it's a sexy word: thigh.

'Dariez, hello?'

'Sorry, I was spacing out.'

She looks down at my hand and gives a little smirk. She doesn't move it away. 'You're funny. I was asking you if you like it here.'

'It's not bad. It's better than the school.'

'I believe that.' Now her hand-her another hand- is on top of my hand on top of her thigh. I think of the dancing sandwich I was in before in the activity lounge. I feel

how warm she is and remember how I noticed that at the party, eons ago. 'I've been thinking about going to a place like this.'

'What?' I pull my body away but keep my hand under hers.

'What do you mean?'

'I've been thinking of, you know, checking myself in, spending some time- here, or somewhere like it, reentering, like you.'

'Emmah.' I shake my head. 'You can't just come in here because you want to.' 'Isn't that what you did?'

'No!'

'What did you do, then?' She tilts her head.

'I... I had like a medical emergency,' I explain. 'I called up the Suicide Hotline and they sent me here.'

Emmah leans back. 'You called the Suicide Hotline?' She holds my hand up, clutches it. 'Oh, Dariez!' I look at my crotch. I'm springing up. I can't help it. She's so close. This face is so close to mine and it's the same face I've jerked off to so ~Sped~ times. I've conditioned myself to want this face. I want her. I feel her on me and I want her right now in her little Russian army outfit. I want to see what she looks like with it off. I want to see what she looks like with it half off.

'I didn't realize...' she continues. 'I knew you wanted to kill yourself; I never knew you wanted to kill yourself. I never- would have told Kristopher that you called me from that weird number if

I'd known it was so serious.'

'Well, what do you think kids come here for?' My hand twitches around hers.

'To get better?' She asks.

'Yeah, exactly. But you have to be bad before they make you get better here.'

Emmah swishes her head and her hair slides around her dark eyes. 'I thought that you got bad because of me. And I thought I could make you better.'

She's so cute. The way she holds her face, it's like she always knows the best angles. We hold each other's eyes. I see myself in hers. I look expectant, ready, eager, stupid, willing to do anything.

I don't like how I look. Humble wouldn't like it either; it doesn't have any strength or will. But I don't have any strength or will when I'm with her. I don't have any choice. We're going to do whatever she wants.

'What about Kristopher?' I ask.

'I told you.' She drops almost to a whisper. 'I broke up with him.'

'You broke up with him?' I want it clarified.

'It was mutual. Is this important?'

'Probably broke up?'

'Looks like it.'

'Don't you think it's a little soon for you to be coming in here and, like, touching me?'

She shakes her head and purses her lower lip. 'I've been thinking about you since we talked on the phone Friday night. And now I know you so much better. You've told me all this stuff about you and you're really ... I don't know ... you're mature. You're not like all these other kids with their stupid little problems. You're like, really screwed up.' She giggles. 'In a good way... The way that gives experience.' 'Huh.' I'm not sure what to say. No, wait, I know what to say: Go away, leave, I don't need you; I finished with you on the phone before; I met a girl here who's cooler and smarter; but when you've got a gorgeous girl in front of you and she's biting her lip and talking low and smiling-and you're hard-what are you going to do?

'Huh ... uh ... well...' I'm back to stuttering. Maybe it was Emmah that made me stutter. I'm sweating too. 'Do you want to show me your room?' She asks.

That's a bad idea. It's a bad idea just as much as it's a bad idea to skip meals or stay awake in bed in the morning or stop taking your Zolof, but there's no hope for me now. I cede control to my lower half, which is pointing toward my room, and lead Emmah to it.

Part: 16

Joy isn't in the room. I can't believe it-it's like the first time since I've been here. I look at her rumpled sheets and try to make out a here form, but there isn't enough bulk to account for her. I peek in the bathroom-nothing.

'You have a roommate?' Emmah asks.

'Yeah, uh, he's usually here...'

'Ewe-www...' She waves in front of her nose. 'Something smells.'

'The roommate's Italian; I don't think he wears deodorant.'

'Me either.'

I make like I'm cleaning up my stuff near my bed, but really, I'm just taking my brain maps and flipping them over.

'You don't get a TV?'

'No.'

'Do you read in here?'

'I like to read out in the hall with other kids. My sister gave me a Star magazine, but the nurses took it away to read themselves.'

She walks toward me, looking up idly glib and innocent. 'Do you get lonely here?'

'Actually, no.' I tell her. I move hair that is stuck to my forehead. I'm sweating now. 'It's very social here. I made friends.'

'Who?'

'That lady you were talking to outside.'

'Her? She's so rude. She honed in on our conversation.'

'She thinks someone sprayed insecticide in her apartment, Emmah. She gets paranoid.' 'Really? That's crazy. That's crazy.'

'I don't know. She might be right.' Emmah is a few feet away from me now. Her shoulders are tilted up at me. I could pick her up and throw her on my unmade bed just like Kristopher has done for the past two years. These words we're saying are just a front.

'She's a college professor.'

There might be something to it.'

'Dariez...' She's right in front of me now. 'Do you remember when you called me'- she touches my forehead-'oh, you're sweating!'

'Yeah, I do that. When I get nervous.' 'Are you okay? You're sweating.' 'I'm all right.' I wipe it away.

'Seriously, Dariez, that is gross.' She scowls, then gets back to where she was. 'When you called me, you remember how you asked what I would do if you came over and grabbed me and kissed me?'

'Yeah...' My stomach is tight. The boy is down there pulling on the rope. I thought I had him beat. I'd been eating so well.

'I'd let you,' she says. 'You know I would.'

Now she's got her glossy, sparkly lips turned up at me, and I feel this amazing dichotomy going on. It's almost like before I came in here when I was in my mom's bed when my brain wanted to die but my heart wanted to live. Now, quite literally, everything from my stomach up wants to run to the bathroom, to throw up, to talk to Armelio or Joy or Paullie, to kick Emmah out, to get ready for my second date with Joy. But the bottom half has been denied too long. It's been ready for this for two years, and it knows what it wants. It says that the real cause of all my problems is that I haven't been satisfying it.

And these aren't any lips, either, that I'm presented with to rectify my lack of play. These are lips that I've had access to for years in my mind. I've done terrible, horrible things to these lips in the privacy of my bathroom. So- screw it. You've got to try sometime. I lean down and grab Emmah and push her back on Joy's bed.

I didn't mean to; I meant to turn her around and put her on my bed, but she happened to be in front of me and I couldn't switch directions in mid-grab. I cover her with my thin body and kiss her upper lip first, encase it in my lips, then do the lower one, then try to do them both at once, only that doesn't work, it's like trying to pull the lips off her head, and she laughs, which gives me her beautiful smile to kiss, the hard white teeth- I don't mind- and then I use my tongue the way I've seen in movies and put my hands on her soldier outfit and feel what I don't have and have wanted for years pressing back at me, taut and yielding at the same time. Two of them.

'Mm,' Emmah m-mms, putting her small hands on the back of my head. She feels my hair; I shake against her. I can't believe how good it feels. This is how good it feels? Why the hell did I ever get depressed?

I remember what Kristopher said about the inside of a girl's cheek feeling like another place and I lick the insides of hers. She shivers; she likes it; it's like Kristopher said: she likes sex; her tongue becomes a jittery dart flicking in and out of my mouth. I feel the ring-a a little metal bubble, something to add texture, foreign and dirty.

Forget it. Let's do it. I reach up to the buttons on her outfit.

My eyes are closed because if I open them, I think I might get a little too excited and ruin my pants, and Mom didn't bring me any pants.

Darn, the button I'm grabbing is in the middle. Up to one. No.

That's not it. One more.

'God.' she pulls away. 'I always wanted to hook up in a hospital.'

'What?' I look up at her chin. I'm still on top of her on Joy's bed, my legs sticking way off, almost hitting my bed.

'This was totally on my checklist.' She looks down. 'I and Kristopher never did anything like this.' That's a body blow to my whole body: the lower half that wanted this and the upper half that warned me about it. I can't think what to say: Please don't compare me to Kristopher? Please don't mention Kristopher? What checklist? So I say: 'Uh... um...' 'Sex!' I hear from the doorway.

It's Joy it's time.

'Sex! Sex in my bed! Children make sex in my bed!' He runs over to us; I jump off Emmah and hold my hands up, thinking he's going to hit me, but he grabs me and holds me close to his square smelly body, and carries me like a girder to the corner of the room.

'Um, Joy-'

'Dariez, who is that?' Emmah yells.

'I live here! Your terrible girl corrupts- my friend!' Joy puts me down, turns, and stands with his arms crossed at Emmah, guarding me. 'You leave!' He points at the open door.

'There's no door!' Emmah peers at it. On some kind of incredible girl-Joy-, she's gotten up, smoothed out her outfit, and collected her purse from near Joy's pillow. She already has her cell phone out; it's blinking at her side. She's gesturing at me with it.

'There's a door, yeah,' I say, standing on tiptoes to talk over Joy's shoulder. 'We just didn't close it-' 'Don't talk to her!' Joy turns and shakes his finger at me. 'She tries and makes the sex in my bed!'

'It wasn't just me, okay?' Emmah bends her face in at him.

He turns back. 'In case you didn't notice, Dariez was on top of me. And we weren't going to have sex.' 'Girl is the temptress. My wife leaves me; I know.'

'Dariez, I'm out-a-here.'

'Uh, okay!' I answer into Joy's back. 'Ah-' I try and think how to sum it up. 'I like making out with you... but I don't really like you as a person...' 'Yeah, same here,' says Emmah.

'What is going on here?' It's Paullie. He shadows the door.

'Joy, what are you doing? And excuse me, young lady?'

'I was just leaving,' Emmah says.

'You're the visitor for Dariez, right?'

'Not anymore.'

'What happened in here?'

'Nothing,' says Joy. 'Everything fine.' He steps aside, turns, and gives me what I guess he thinks is a wink through his glasses.

'Yeah, absolutely.' I catch on. 'Joy just came in and was surprised to see two kids in the room.'

'Well, he should be,' says Paullie, 'because you're not supposed to have visitors in your room. Don't let it happen again, okay?'

'No problem.'

'Yeah, because you won't be seeing me again,' says Emmah, and Paullie gives her a disbelieving look as she walks away from him, stomping down the hall, slamming her shoes with each step.

He shrugs at us.

'All right,' he says to her back. 'Sign out on your way out, miss.'

'Dariez, what kind of girl is going to put up with this ... crap?' Emmah turns around, spreads her arms, and gestures to the hall as if she owns it while she backs away. 'Be quiet, Doomba!' yells President Armelio from somewhere. She turns back around and doesn't give any more looks back.

'Huh,' Paullie says. 'Lovely girl. Everything cool, boys?'

We nod like kindergartners. 'Yes.'

'Don't let anything like that happen again, Dariez.'

'I won't.'

'Otherwise, you'll be here a long time-.' Paullie walks away from the door; Joy waits a few moments and then turns to me.

'Dariez, I am sorry I only have very important beliefs about sex.'

'No, I understand. You did a good thing.'

'You are not in trouble, yes?'

'No, I'm fine. You handled it perfectly, boy.' I put out my hand to get a slap from him, but he misinterprets that as a handshake attempt, so I take the initiative and turn it into a hug, a big smelly one. His glasses smack against me.

'I am out trying to get Italian music in hospital,' he says. 'You give me an idea. But they have none. Now I rest.' And he climbs back in bed, rearranges his sheet, curls into a fetal position, and stares through me.

I glance at the door. Right there, with her bright green eyes wide open, is Joy.

'I only have a couple of questions for you,' Joy says, walking up fast at seven o'clock as I sit in the chair that I've come to call my conference chair since I meet with so ~Sped~ kids in it. I wonder what else has happened in this chair-kids have probably peed on it, licked it, drummed their heads against it, and writhed around in it spouting gibberish. That gives me comfort. It feels like a chair with some history.

I didn't think Joy was going to show up, so I almost didn't come-but then I decided I didn't want any regrets. I'm done with those; regrets are an excuse for kids who have failed. When I get out in the world, from now on, if I start to regret something, I'm going to remind myself that whatever I could have done, it won't change the fact that I was in a psychiatric hospital. This, right here, is the biggest regret I could ever have. And it's not so bad.

I rush out to talk to her, but she flies down to her room and closes her door. I run up to it and knock, but there's no answer, and when Paullie passes me, shooting a look, I have to stop knocking.

I check the clock in the hall and sigh. It's five. Two hours after our second date.

Joy seems to be looking at me for comment. But I'm amazed at how she looks. New clothes: a pair of tight blue jeans cut down dangerously low and a sliver of white underwear sticking out above them. Does the underwear look like it has pink stars on it-do girls' underwear have pink stars? ...And I almost stare, before my eyes are drawn by

the soft curve of her stomach to her T-shirt, which is wrapped against her with some kind of mystical female force, reading I- HATE BOYS.

How come girls are coming to me dressed all hot all of a sudden?

Above the shirt is her face, bordered by blond hair pulled back and highlighted by her cuts.

'Uh... Why'd you wear that T-shirt?' I ask. 'Is that a message to me?'

'No. I hate boys, not you. And this is one reason why: they're so arrogant. Why is that?' She stands with her hands on her hips.

'Well ...' I think. 'Do you want like, a real, honest answer?' My brain is working better than it did before. It has bagels and soup and sugar and chicken in it. It's firing almost like it used to.

'No, Dariez, I want a big, dumb, fake answer.' Joy rolls her eyes. I think her breasts roll in sync with them. Girls' breasts are so amazing.

'Wait, you didn't ask a question!' I smirk. 'One point for you.'

'We're not playing the game, Dariez. We were going to, but I'm too mad.'

'Okay, well, darn...' I start. 'What were we talking about?'

'Why boys are so arrogant.'

'Right. Well, you know, were born into the world seeing that we're just a little bit... We tend to have things a little bit easier than girls. And we tend to assume therefore that the world was built for us, and that we're, you know, the culmination of everything that came before us. And then we get told that having a little bit of this attitude is called balls and that balls are good, and we kind of take it from there.'

'Wow, you are honest,' she says, sitting down. 'An honest asshole.' Yes! She sat down! 'Who the hell was that girl?' 'A girl I know.'

'She's pretty.' (It's amazing how girls can say this and make it the most withering insult.) 'Is she your girlfriend?'

'No. I don't have a girlfriend. Never had a girlfriend.'

'So-o, she was just a girl you were hooking up within your room?' 'You saw, huh.'

'I saw everything: from out here to your roommate's bed.'

'What, you were following me?'

'I'm not allowed?'

'Well, no-'

'You don't like it?' She leans in. 'You don't like some poor little girl'-she throws on a Little Bo-Peep voice, fluffs her hair- 'following big, da- Dariez around the ward?'

'It's not an award, it's a psych hospital.' But yes, yes, I do like you following me around; yes, that's awesome. 'I can't believe I didn't notice you. ...' I think of the flashes of Joy and time- with Emmah if I ever glanced down the hall or checked behind me.

'You were in a state of excitement; that's why.'

'Well. You want to know who she was?'

'No. I lost interest.'

'You did?'

'No! Tell me!'

'Okay, okay, she was this girl I've known for a long time-, and she came in here-'

'Just overcome with lust for you?'

'Yeah, sure, exactly; she came in overcome with lust and I took advantage of her.' I flick my hand. 'No, what happened is she came in here lonely and confused, I think, and thinking that she belonged in a place like this... '

'That was pretty funny when your roommate caught you.

That kind of made the whole thing worthwhile.'

'I'm glad you think so.'

'You're never going to be a good cheater. You're going to be one of those boys who gets caught on the first try.'

'Is that good?'

'You didn't even close the door. How'd you know the girl?'

'She was my best friend's girlfriend since we were like thirteen.'

'How old are you now?'

'Fifteen.'

'Me too.'

I look at her anew. There's something about kids who are the same age. It's like you got piped out in the same shipment. You've got to stick together. Because deep down I believe my year was special: it produced me.

'So, you ____ ed your best friend's, girlfriend?'

'No, they broke up.'

'When?'

'Uh, a few days ago.'

'She moves fast!'

'I think,' I think out loud, 'she's just one of these girls who's not had a boyfriend.' 'Some of us, we'd call those girls sluts. Do you think she had a boyfriend when she was eight?'

'Ewe.'

'Maybe she was letting-'

'Stop! Stop! I don't want to hear it.'

'It happens.' Joy looks at me.

I nod, and pause, and let that sink in. It does happen.

'Um... how are you?' I ask.

'You think you're really smart, don't you?'

I laugh. 'No. That's one of the reasons I came in here. Thinking I was dumb.'

'Why would you think that? You're in a smart school.'

'I wasn't doing well there.'

'What were you getting?'

'Ninety-threes.'

Oh.' Joy nods.

'Yeah.' I folded my arms. 'I think you're really smart. You probably get good grades.'

'Not really.' She puts her chin in her palms like someone in a painting. 'You're not very good at giving compliments.'

'What?'

'I'm smart! C'mon.' 'You're attractive, too!' I say. 'Does that work?'

You're attractive! Did I say that already? I said it the other day, right?'

'Attractive? Dariez, real estate is attractive. Houses.'

'Sorry, you're beautiful. What about that?' I can't believe I'm saying it. We'll both be out of here in two days; that's why I'm saying it. No regrets. 'Beautiful is all right. There are better ones.'

'Okay, okay, cool.' I crack my neck-

'Ewe-www. "What?'

'Don't do that. Especially when you're about to compliment me.'

'Fine, okay. What are better words than beautiful?'

She puts on a Southern accent: "Go-geous."

'Okay, okay, you're gorgeous.'

'That sounds terrible. Do it my way: go-geous.'

I do it.

'You can't even do a Southern accent? Oh my gosh, are you even from America?'
'Gimme a break! I'm from here!' 'Knox?'

'Yeah.'

'This neighborhood?'

'Yeah.'

"I have friends here.

'We should meet one day-.'

'You are so terrible. Try other compliments.

'OK.' I dig deep. I did not understand. 'Uh...'

'You don't know anymore?'

"I'm not good with words."

"See, that's why math geeks don't have daughters."

'Who said I was a math geek? I told you my grades sucked.

'You might be one of those nerds that's not smart. They are the worst.

"Listen," I stop him. "I'm really glad you're here to talk with me, and I've met a lot of kids here."

"Oh-oh," she said. "Is this the part where it all gets serious?"

"Yes," I said. And when I say it, the way I say it, I see that she understands that I really want to be serious. I can be serious now. I been through some serious shit and I can be serious like someone older.

"I love you very much", I begin. No regrets. "Because you're funny and smart and because you seem to like me." I know that's not a good reason, but I can't help it; if a girl likes me, i tend to like her back.

She says nothing. I bow my head towards her. 'Uh, do you want to say something?' 'Nope. Nope! Its good. Keep on going.' 'Well, okay, I've been thinking about how to put this. I like you for all that but I also kind of like you for the cuts on your face-'

'Oh no, are you a fetishist?'

'What?'

"Are you like blood fetishists? There was one here before. He wanted me to like his queen of the night or something.

'Nope! It is not like that. It's like this: when children have problems, you know... I come here and I see that children everywhere have problems. I mean, the kids I've befriended are pretty much a bunch of hoodlums, old drug addicts, kids who can't keep a job; but then, every few days, someone new comes along who looks like they just walked out of a business meeting.

Joy nods. She saw them too: the scruffy young boy who came today with a stack of books as if it were a reading retreat.

The boy who came yesterday in a suit and practically told me that he had heard voices and that they were really annoying; they didn't say anything scary but they always said the dumbest things while he was on trial.

And not just here: everywhere. My friends are all calling me now: this one is depressed, that one is depressed. I look at what the doctors give out, and some studies show that a fifth of Americans have a mental illness, and suicide is the number two killer among teens and all that crap...I mean everybody's screwed.

'What are you getting at?'

"We carry our problems differently. Like I don't talk, stop eating and vomit all the time-'

'Did you vomit?'

'Yeah. Wrong. And I stopped sleeping. And when I started doing that, my parents noticed, and my friends noticed, sort of, they were laughing at me, but I could go around the world without really disclosing what was wrong. Until I come here. Now it's like: something is wrong. Or was wrong, because I feel like it's getting better.

'What does it have to do with me?'

"You're there for your problems," I said. "You put them on your face.

She stops, puts her hand in her hair.

"I cut my face because too many ~Sped~ too many ~Sped~ kids wanted something from me," she tries to explain. "There was so much pressure, it was-'
'Something to respect?'

'Exactly.'

"The kids told you were sexy and then all of a sudden they treated you differently?"

'Right.'

'How?'

She sighs. 'You have to be the prude or the bitch, and if you choose one, the other kids hate you for it, and you can't trust anyone anymore, because they're all after the same thing, and you see that you can never go back to how it was before..."

She places her face in one of those faces that could laugh or cry – they use so many ~Sped~ of the same muscles – and leans forward.

"And I didn't want to be part of it," she says. "I didn't want to be part of this world."

I catch her leaning against me, feel for the first time the soft dimple in her body. 'Neither do I.'

She puts her arms around me and we stand like this from our two chairs, like a house built on top of them, and I don't move my hands at all and "I wasn't okay there".

'What did you get?' 'Ninety-three.' 'Oh.' Joy nods. 'Yeah.' I said to my arms. 'I think you're really smart.

You probably have good grades.

'Not really.' She puts her chin in her palms like someone in a painting. "You're not very good at giving compliments.

'What?'

'I'm smart! Let's go.' 'You are attractive too!' I say. 'Does it work?

You are attractive! Did I already say that? I said it the other day, didn't I?

'Attractive? Dariez, real estate is attractive. Houses.'

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"Okay, okay, cool." I crack my neck-

'Ewe-www.'

'What?'

'Do not do that. Especially when you're about to compliment me.

'Fully agree. What are the best words than beautiful?

She puts a southern accent: "Go-geous".

"Okay, okay, you're beautiful."

'It looks awful. Do it my way: "Go-geous".

I do.

'You can't even do a Southern accent? Oh my God, are you even from America?' 'Leave me alone! I come from here!

"Knox? '

Yeah.'

" This district ?

'Yeah.'

"I have friends here.

'We should meet one day-.'

'You are so terrible. Try other compliments.

'Okay-' I dig deep. I did not understand. 'Uh...'

'You don't know anymore?'

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'Well, okay, I've been thinking about how to put this.

I

-I-I-love you for all this but I also love you for the cuts on your face-'

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"I cut my face off because the kids too ~Sped~-too ~Sped~ wanted something from me," she tries to explain. "There was so much pressure, it was-'

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'Exactly.'

"The kids told you were hot and then all of a sudden they treated you differently?"

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She places her face in one of those faces that could laugh or cry – they use so many ~Sped~ of the same muscles – and leans forward.

"And I didn't want to be part of it," she says. "I didn't want to be part of this world."

I catch her leaning against me, feel for the first joy of time- the soft dimple of her body. 'Neither do I.'

She wraps her arms around me and we stand like a house built on top of our two chairs, and I don't move my hands at all and neither does she.

"I didn't want to play the smart game," I tell him. "And you didn't want to play the pretty game."

'The pretty game is worse,' she whispers. "Nobody wants to use you to be smart."

"The kids wanted to use you? '

Someone did. Someone who shouldn't.

I stop.

'I am sorry.'

"It wasn't you."

"Shouldn't I touch you?"

"No, no, you didn't do anything. Its good. But yes."

It happened. And I lied before.

'About what?'

"It doesn't matter what type of operation I had. I did it with half a chisel, Dariez. It's going to leave scars. I'll have scars for the rest of my life. I didn't know what I was doing. I just wanted to leave the world for a bit after this...this thing...and now I can never get a job or anything. What are they going to say when I walk into an interview? hiring looking like...?" "She snuffles and laughs and snot comes out. "...Like a Klingon?"

"There are places in Califor-Emmah where they speak

Klingon. You can get a job there.

'Stop it.'

We're still holding each other. I don't want to look up. I keep my eyes closed.

"There are also anti-discrimination laws. They can't hire you if you're qualified. But I look like a freak now."

"I told you, Joy, I said in her ear. 'Everyone has problems. Some kids hide their bullshit better than others. run away. They're going to look at you and think they can talk to you, and you're going to understand, and you're brave, and you're strong. And you are. You're brave and strong.

" You're getting better with compliments."

'No, I'm nothing; I can barely hold back food.

"Yeah, you're skinny. She laughs. 'We need to fatten you up.'

'I say.'

'I'm happy to have met you.'

"You are naked and honest, Joy; that is what you are." The words come to mind like they've always been there. 'And in Africa your scars would be highly prized.'

She snuffles again. 'I didn't like seeing you with that other girl.

'I know. '

'You love me more, don't you?'

'Right.'

'Why?'

I pull away from her - maybe the first time - in my life I've ended a hug - because a level of eye contact is necessary.

"I owe you so much more than I owe her." You have opened my eyes to something. My real eyes have been closed for so long on Joy's shoulder that the room is blinding. But when they readjust, I see the professor watching us from her door, holding the handshake with one hand and his shoulder with the other

"I wanted to show you this. I reach under my chair to pick up something for our meeting - I had it there as an asset. I didn't think that the date would go like this; I thought it would be Joy yelling at me and

that I should do something drastic. But now I can do something drastic and it will be like icing on the cake. I pull out the card brain of my couple and shows it to him.

'It's beautiful!'

"It's a boy and a girl, you see? I haven't done my hair, but you see how one has a feminine profile and the other is masculine. They're lying down, not on top of each other, just side by side, floating in space. They have legs and arms sketched on the sides, but that's the whole point of my brain maps - you don't need to spend a lot of time on the legs or arms. What they have is full of brains and complete with swirling bridges and intersections and plazas and parks. These are the most elaborate I've ever done: split arteries, alleys, Mill Run Road, roundabouts. -points, tunnels and toll booths. The paper is 14' x 19' and I had room to make the maps huge; the bodies are small and unimportant; the key element that catches your eye (because I understand now, somehow, that's how the works of art) is a soaring bridge between the two heads, longer than the Kinzua Bridge, even, with coils of railings like crushed ribbons at each end.

"Maybe this is my best yet," I said.

She examines him; I see the red in his eyes fade. There are no streaks of tears - I still haven't seen real streaks of tears on anyone. Her tears went straight into my shirt; they are now cooling and rubbing on my shoulder. "You suggested I do some childhood stuff," I continue. "I used to do this when I was a kid, and I forgot how much fun it was."

"I bet you've never done them like that."

"No, well, it's easier, because I don't have to finish the cards."

'It's nice.'

'Thanks for getting me started. I owe you a lot.

'Thanks. Can I keep it? She looks up. 'Not yet. I have to fix it. I stand up, stretch my back and shrug my shoulders.

Do it, soldier.

Yes sir!

"But, uh, I was wondering if I could have your phone number, so I can call you when we get out of here."

She smiles and her cuts outline her face like cat's whiskers.

'Cunning.'

"I'm a boy," I say.

"And I hate boys," she said.

"But a boy is different," I said.

"Maybe a little," she said.

Humble is back at dinner. He has entirely new clothes, a clean-shaven face, and eyes that don't quite open; he settles down at his usual table under the TV in the dining room, which everyone has left empty during his absence. Joy is there too, at the next table, with her back to him; I walk in, say hello to them both, grab the tables, put them together and sit between them smiling.

"Joy, I don't know if you had the chance to meet Humble.

"Not really," she said. She always smiles. From our date, I hope.

"Humble, Joy. Joy, humble.

'Uh-huh...' he said, narrowing his eyes. "Those cuts on your face are trippy."

'Thanks?' They shake hands.

"You have a good handshake for a girl," Humble said.

"You got a good one for a boy.

My dinner is beans, hot dogs and salad, with cookies and pears at the end. I attack it.

"So where did they take you?" I ask between bites.

"Across the hall to Geriatrics," Humble said.

"With the old kids?" Joy asks.

'Yeah. That's where they take you when they need to drive you crazy.

'Where did you hear the term 'wacky'?' Joy asks.

" Struck? "Humble rips a piece of lettuce out of his teeth with his thumb.

"No, she thinks you say 'Wack', like 'it's Wack'," I explain.

'Wacky, wacky, whacked is the same word. It's an old word. I had an uncle named Wacky, what are you kidding? Boy, don't start with me. This kid has a lot of problems.

"Yeah, I know," Joy said. And she bumps her knee against my thigh. Impressive. A girl hasn't done this to me since fourth grade. "He's a mess."

"I know," said Humble. "It's because he's too smart for his own good. He comes here; he's worn out. I have already seen it. I see it all the Joy-, but in kids in their twenties, thirties. This boy is so smart he got burned half the time. He has a midlife crisis as a teenager.

"Forget the midlife crisis," I say. "It's all about the sixth life crisis. '

What is that?'

'Well...' I look at Joy. She won't hit me with her leg again? I don't know if I want to talk. I don't want to bore him. But I know I won't annoy Humble, and if I don't annoy him either, that would be a big win.

"Well, first there's the quarter-life crisis," I said. "It's like the characters in Friends-kids freaking out that they won't get married. The twenty-year-old one. It's probably true that kids have quarter-life seizures; I wouldn't know But I know things are going faster now. You used to have to wait until you were 20 to have enough choices in your life to start freaking out. But now there's so much to do. buy, and therefore ~Sped~ ways to pass your time and joy-, and thus ~Sped~ specialties that you need to start very early in realistic ballet, okay, Joy, when did you start the ballet?'

"Four".

'Okay. I started Tae Bo when I was six. So there's like- ~Sped~ kids angling for success and so ~Sped~ colleges you're supposed to get into, and so ~Sped~ women you're supposed to have sex with-'

'You got to freak them out,' Joy said from across the room. 'Have you been spoken to? Humble asks.

'Huh, eat your salt.'

"What, badass? How about if I hit you on the head, how would you like-'

'Boys.' Joy stands up and brushes her hair away from her cheeks, which are red in addition to being cropped. Everyone is silent.

"So now," I continue, "instead of a quarter-life crisis, they have a fifth life crisis when you are eighteen and a sixth life crisis when you are fourteen. I think that's what a lot of kids have.

'What you have.'

'Not just me. It's the...uh...should I continue?' "Yes," said Joy.

"Well, there are a lot of kids making a lot of money with fifth and sixth life crises. All of a sudden they've got a ton of scared consumers ready to buy face cream, designer jeans, SAT prep classes, condoms, cars, scooters, books self-help, watches, wallets, stocks, whatever... all the crap twenty-somethings used to buy, now ten-somethings are buying it. They doubled their market!

Joy pulled up a chair next to me. "This kid is fucking crazy," he said.

"I hope they keep it here," Humble said.

'So very soon.' I keep thinking. "There will be seventh and eighth life crises. Then finally a baby will be born and the doctors will look at it and immediately wonder if it is not equipped to face the world; if they decide that doesn't look happy, they'll put him on antidepressants, start him on that particular drinking path.

"Hm," Humble said. I think he's going to go on with something, but instead he goes, 'Hm.'

Then- Like... 'Your problem is that you have a depression-informed view of the world.' He bends. "And the rabies?

"I was never very enraged."

'Why?'

"It's so much angrier in my head than it could ever be on the outside." 'Extra cookies!'

She's one of the nurses. We all line up; it's oatmeal and peanut butter. As I drag my feet forward, Joy nudges me from behind; when I turn to her, she turns her face away as if I was trying to kiss her but she wouldn't let me.

"Your problem," I said.

"You're stupid," she replies.

I did it. I spoke - and she loved me; she thought I was smart. I start making a plan. Once I get my cookies, I go to the phone to call Dad, who is already bringing Blade II tomorrow night. I want him to bring something else too.

It's your last full day in the hospital, that's what I think when I wake up - no one is taking my blood today (it's only happened once since Sunday) so I don't get up not very early, but I'm always the first in the corridors. I take my shower and think how life would suck if the hot water didn't come out of the shower-head when you wanted it to. I've tried taking cold showers and they're wonderful when they're done, but during the process they feel like some form of animal torture. But again, that's when you take a cold shower, you're supposed to get in and out as quickly as possible; that's why they do it in the army.

It's true! Do you want to shoot, soldier?

I don't think... Sir.

Come on, what's up with you? You have a lot going for you; don't you want to continue?

I need a cold shower to get things done?

It's true. Less time in the shower, more on the battlefield.

Good.

I can do it. I reach out and slowly turn the temperature knob to the left, then decide I'm never going to do it gradually, so I'm going to have to do it like a Band-Aid - jerk it off. The water goes from lukewarm to freezing so quickly it feels like it's burning me. I bend my groin out of its way, but I know that's cheating, so I push it back into place as I furiously soap myself. Leg: up!

Down! Another leg: up! Down! Crotch: uh, rub-rub-rub. Chest: wipe. Arm: down! Return! Other-arm: down! Return! Neck, face, turn around, wash your ass and I'm off! Straight to the towel. I wrap it around me and shiver.

I can't wait to put on my clothes so much that my socks stick to my wet feet. I'm going out to talk with Paullie.

" How are you ? "

First cold shower.'

'Of the day?'

'Of my life.'

"Yeah, that'll hit you."

'What are the news?'

Paullie holds her paper. It looks like a new candidate is running for mayor of Knox promising to give everyone who votes for him a lap dance. He's a multi-billionaire, and at \$100 a lap dance, he thinks he can lock in the vote. Many women support him.

'It's crazy.' I'm shivering. "It's like... Who's over there and who's over here, you know?"

'Absolutely. Better music here, though. Paullie turns on the radio.

"By the way, that's a question I ask myself: can I play music in the lobby tonight? At the other end?"

'What kind?'

'There are no words, don't worry, nothing offensive. It's something that one of the kids in the room will love. Like a gift.

'I have to see him first.'

'OK. And you know I bring this blade? movie tonight to watch with the band.

"Think about it for a minute. You present a vampire film in a floor full of psychiatric patients.

"They can handle it."

"I'm not going to have nightmares?" '

Promise.'

"Nightmares are a big problem in my job, Dariez."

'Understood.'

Paullie sighs puts down her paper and gets up. "Do you want me to do your vital signs?"

He ties me to the chair, pumps me and puts his soft fingers on my wrist. Today I have 120/70. The first day I was not perfect.

Suite: 1

'How are you?' Dr. Ross is like.

It's 11 a.m., I sigh. After vital signs, it was breakfast, where the Boy Who Was Afraid of Gravity and Rolling Pin Robert had gone. Humble told me and Joy that they had been released. Towards the end of the meal, Joy touched her leg against mine for as long as it took me to drink the first sip of my Sweet-Touch Nee tea after breakfast, which was a big sip. Then Monieec announced that we would screen Blade II tonight in front of the smoking room and everyone was enthusiastic, especially Joy: "Huh, this movie is cool; many vampires die. No announcement about my music, but again it hadn't arrived yet.

I took my Zolofit out of my little plastic cup and drew brain maps by the window in the corner of the hallway next to My-a Joy. I processed my phone messages, started thinking seriously about what I would do as soon as I got out - would I buy a cup of coffee? Walk to the park? Go home and start with email?

-And-

This got me thinking about email, and all of a sudden I was really glad I had Dr. Ross to talk to. "I'm fine, I think."

She looks at me calmly and steadily. Maybe she's my anchor.

"What puts you in doubt, Dariez?"

'Sorry?'

'You said you were fine 'you think.' Why do you just think about that?

"It's an expression," I said.

"Not the place to go if you're not feeling better, Dariez."

"Okay, well, I thought of my email."

'Yes?'

"I'm really worried about going out and having to check it out. Phones I'm caught up with, but email could be pretty deadly.

"Deadly... How can an email be deadly, Dariez?"

'Good.' I straighten up, take a deep breath. Then I remember something. 'You know how hard I had to start and stop my sentences before?'

'Yes.'

'Not recently.'

'Really?'

'Yeah, it's like the opposite, like the words can get out of me, like they did when I was in trouble in class.' 'What was... ' She concentrates on her notepad to write this.

'A year ago before- I went to Executive Pre-Professional.'

'Right now, tell me about the email.' 'The email.' I put my hands on the table. 'I hate that. Like, right now, I haven't checked it in five days, okay?'

" Since Saturday. She nods.

'It's true. Now, what are the kids thinking trying to reach me? They're kids who probably already have an idea of where I am because

Emmah told Kristopher the number and he got it.

'Okay: a great source of shame for you.'

'Yes. But even if someone has no idea where I am, what are they thinking? Five days. They're like: He's crazy. He must have overdosed or something. Everyone expects me to respond instantly and I am unable to do so.

"Who sends you e-mails, Dariez?"

"Kids wanting homework, teachers, school clubs, announcements about charities I should volunteer at, invitations to football games, basketball games, executive pre-pro squash..."

"So they're mostly school-related."

"They are all school related. My friends don't email me. They are calling.'

"So why don't you just ignore the emails?" '

I can't!'

'Why not?'

'Because- then the children will be offended!'

"And... what happens then?"

"Well, I won't be able to join clubs, get credits, participate in stuff, get extra credits... I will fail."

'At school.'

'Right.' I'm taking a break. No, it's not exactly school. That's what comes after school. 'To the life.'

'Oh.' She pauses. 'Life.'

'Right.'

“To fail in school is to fail in life.

"Well... I'm at school!" It's the only thing I'm supposed to do. I know a lot of famous kids didn't do well in school, like James Brown; he dropped out in fifth grade to be an artist, I respect that... but it won't be me. I won't be able to do anything but work as hard as I can all the joy – and compete with everyone I know all the joy – to get there. And now school is the only thing I have to do. And I'm away from email and I can't do it.

'But your definition of school is not one thing, it's ~Sped~ different things, Dariez: extracurricular activities plus sports plus volunteering. Not to mention homework.

'Law.'

"How anxious would you say you are about all this, Dariez?

I think back to what Joy said, about anxiety being a medical thing. The email has stuck in the back of my head since I got here, the stubborn certainty that when I go out, I'll have to sit in front of the computer for five or six hours going through everything I've missed, respond to it by reversing the order because that's how it happens and therefore take the longest time Joy- to respond to the kids who emailed me in the past on more distant. And then, while I'm replying to them, others will come, and they'll sit on top of my pile and laugh at me, challenge me to answer them before I dig in, telling me I need them, as opposed to one or two of the emails that are actually about something I care about. These will be saved to the end, and by the joy - I have the joy - to take care of them, they will be so overwhelmed that I will only have to apologize: Sorry, my boy. I couldn't reply to my email. No, I'm not important, just incapable.

« Dariez ? »

"Very anxious," I answer.

"Email anxiety and chess speeches... These are topics that you have already touched on. They afflict you very much. 'I know. I'm sweating.'

'Is you?'

'yes. And I haven't sweated in a while.

'You have been away from your tentacles.'

'Law. Not anymore. Now I can go back and they are all there for me.

"Remember what I asked you last time, Joy-, about whether you found anchors here or not?"

'Yes.'

She pauses. To ask a question, it is often possible for Dr. Ross only to indicate that she could ask a question.

"I think I found one," I sigh.

'What is this?'

'Can I get up and take it?'

'Absolutely.'

I leave the office and walk down the hallway, where Joy leads a recruit on her welcome tour — a black boy with crazy teeth and a stained blue tracksuit.

"This is Dariez," said Joy. "He's young, but he's at the level. He makes drawings.

I shake hands with the boy. It's true. I make drawings.

'Um- Being,' boys...

"That's his name," Joy explains, rolling her eyes.

"Your name is not Dariez; it's Um- Being too, said the boy.

I nod, break the handshake and continue walking to my room. It's literally like walking away from a monster — the further I get away from the thought of emails and Dr. Ross and the fact that I'm going to have to leave here and go back to Executive Preprofessional, the calmer I become. And the closer I get to brain maps, this stupid little thing I can do, the calmer I become. I walk past Joy - he stares at me and tries to sleep - and I take my art off the radiator cover. I put him in a pile in front of Joy and Um-Being- who now explains how his real last name is Green and that's what he needs, a green return to the office.

"I like it here," I said to Dr. Ross.

"That pièce?"

"No, the hospital.

"When you're done, you can volunteer."

"I talked to guitarist Neil about it. I think I'll try. I can get school credit!"

"That's why you should volunteer, Dariez-"

"No, no... I shake my head. 'I'm just kidding.' 'Oh.' Dr. Ross cuts off his face with a broad smile. "So what do we have here?"

I put them on the table. There are now two dozen. No crazy breakthroughs, just variations on a theme: pigs with brain maps that look like Pittsburgh, my relationship for Joy joined by the sweeping bridge, a family of metropolises.

"Your artwork," she says.

She flips through them, saying "Oh, my" to the particularly good ones. I built that pile last night, not just for Dr. Ross, for anyone. Brain maps have a certain order. Since I've been making them, they specify that they must be stacked for presentation.

'Dariez, they're wonderful.'

'Thank you.' I sit down. We were both standing. I didn't even notice.

"You started this because you were doing it when you were four years old?"

'Law. Ok. Something... like them.

"And how do they make you feel?"

I look at the pile. 'Impressive.'

She leans over. "Why?"

I have to think about it, and when Dr. Ross makes me think, I'm not embarrassed and I try to ignore him. I look to the left and caress my chin.

"Because I do them," I said. "I do them and it's over. It's almost like, you know, peeing?"

'Yes...' Dr. Ross nods. "Something you appreciate." 'Law. I do; it is successful; It feels good, and I know it's - good. When I finish one, I feel like I've done something and the rest of my day can be spent doing anything, stupid, emails, phone calls, everything else.

Dariez, have you ever considered the fact that you could be an artist? "I have other stuff too," I continue. What did she say?

'First of all, I was thinking about this perpetual candle, like a candle on the ground with another candle hanging upside-down over it, and as the first candle melts the wax is kept molten by some kind of hot containment unit and gets pumped up to the second candle and drips down like a stalactite-stalagmite thing, and then I was also thinking: what if you filled a shoe with whipped cream? Just a boy's shoe, filled with whipped cream? That's pretty easy to do. And then you could keep going: a- T-shirt filled with Jell-O, a hat full of applesauce... that's art, right? That kind of stuff. What'd you say about artists?'

She chuckles. 'You seem to enjoy what you're doing here.'

'Yeah, well, duh, it's not the most difficult thing in the world.'

'You're not sweating now.'

'This is a good Anchor for me,' I say. I admit. I admit it. It's a stupid thing to admit. It means that I'm not practical. But then again, I'm already in the loony bin; how practical am I going to get? I might have to give up on practical. 'That's right, Dariez. This can be your Anchor.' Dr. Ross stares at me and doesn't blink. I look at her face, the wall behind her, the door, the shades, the table, my hands on the table, the Brain Maps between us. I could do the one on the top a little better. I could try putting some wood grain in there with the streets. Knots of wood in kid's heads. That could work. 'This can be my Anchor.' I nod. 'But...'

'What, Dariez?'

'What am I going to do about school? I can't go to Executive Pre-Professional for art.'

'I'm going to throw a wild notion at you.' Dr. Ross leans back, then forward. 'Have you ever thought about going to a different school?' I stare ahead. I hadn't. I honestly hadn't.

Not once, not in my whole life, not since I started there. That's my school. I worked harder to get in than I did for anything else, ever. I went there because, coming out of it, I'd be able to be President. Or a lawyer. Rich, that's the point. Rich and successful.

And look where it got me. One stupid year-not even one, like three-quarters of one-and here I am with not one, but two bracelets on my wrist, next to a shrink in a room adjacent to a hill where there's a boy named Um- Being walking around. If I keep doing this for three more years, where will I be? I'll be a complete loser. And what if I keep on? What if I do okay, live with the depression, get into College, do College, go to Grad School, get the Job, get the Money, get Kids and a Wife and a Nice Car? What kind of crap will I be in then? I'll be completely crazy.

I don't want to be completely crazy. I don't like being here that much. I like being a little crazy: enough to volunteer here, not enough to ever, ever, ever come back.

'Yes,' I say. 'Yes- I have thought about it.'

'When? Just now?'

I smile. 'Absolutely.'

'And what do you think?'

I clap my hands together and stand up. 'I think I should call my parents and tell them that I want to transfer to schools.' 'Visitor, Dariez,' Paullie pokes his head into the dining room. I slide my chair back from the table, where I'm playing after-lunch poker with My-a Joy and Joy and Armelio. My-a Joy doesn't have any idea how to play, but we deal him cards and he plays them face down and smiles and we give him more chips (we're using scraps of paper; the buttons are locked up due to our recklessness) whenever he pockets his or chews them up.

'I'll be back,' I say.

'This boy, so busy,' says Armelio.

'He thinks he's all-important,' Joy says.

'I woke up, and the bed was on fire!' Says My-a Joy.

We all look at him. 'You okay, My-a Joy?' I ask. 'My mom hit me in the head. She hit me in the head with a hammer.'

'Oh, wow.' I turn to Armelio. 'I heard him say stuff like this down in the ER. Has he talked about this before?'

'No, nuh-uh, buddy.'

'Hey, My-a Joy, it's okay.' I put my hand on his shoulder. At the same time-, I bite my tongue. You can think someone's hilarious and want to help them at the same time-.

'She hit me in the head,' he says. 'With a hammer!'

'Yeah, but you're here now,' Joy says. 'You're safe. Nobody's going to hit you in the head with anything.'

My-a Joy nods. I keep my hand on his shoulder. I keep my tongue bit down, but I make little-chuffing noises as I try to keep from laughing, and he looks up and notices. He smiles at me, then laughs himself, then picks his cards up and claps my back.

'It'll come to yah,' he says.

'That's right. I know it will.'

I excuse myself from the room and head down the hall. Right at the end is Kristopher, holding the record I want. Dad didn't have it.

'Hey, boy,' he says sheepishly, and as I approach, he leans it against the wall. He's a dick, but I'm not perfect either so I come up and hug him.

'Hey.'

'Well, you were right. My dad had it-Italian

Masters Volume Three.'

'I so appreciate this.' I take the record. It's got a picture on the cover of what looks like the Nile at dusk, with a palm tree tilting left, echoing the brightening moon, and the purple sky rolling up from the horizon.

'Yeah, I'm sorry about everything,' Kristopher says. 'I... uh...

I've had a weird couple of days.'

'You know what?' I look him in the eyes. 'Me too.' 'I bet.' He smiles.

'Yeah, from now on, whenever crap goes down, you can be like 'Oh, Dariez, I had a bad few days', because, I will get what you're talking about.'

'What's it like in here?' He asks.

'There are kids whose lives have been screwed up for a long time, and then there are kids like me, whose lives have been screwed up for... you know... shorter.'

'Did they put you on new drugs?'

'No, same ones I was on before.'

'So-o- are you feeling better?'

'Yeah.'

'What changed?'

'I'm going to leave school.'

'You're what?'

'I'm done. I'm going somewhere else.'

'Where?'

'I don't know yet. I'm going to talk it over with my parents. Somewhere for art.'

'You want to do art?'

'Yeah. I've been doing some in here. I'm good at it.'

'You're pretty good at school too, boy.'

I shrug. I don't need to explain this to Kristopher. He's been demoted from most important friend to friend, and he's going to have to earn that, even. And you know what else? I don't owe kids anything, and I don't have to talk to them any more than I feel I need to.

'What's up with Emmah?' I ask... Have to tread carefully here.

'I got your message, about how things were bad.'

'They got worked out. It was my fault. I got all freaked out about her being on pills and we broke up for like, a few days.'

'Why did that freak you out?'

'I don't need any more of that in my life, you know? I mean, it's bad enough with my dad.'

'He's on medication?'

'Every form of medication in the book. Mom, too. And then me, with the pot... when you come right down to it, there isn't anybody in the household who isn't seriously drugged except the fish.'

'And- you didn't want your girlfriend to be, too.'

'Her smoking is one thing; I just... I can't explain it. I guess you'll have to go out with someone for a long time- to understand. If you're with somebody and then you learn that they need to ... take something daily, you wonder- how good can you be for them?'

'That's pretty stupid,' I say. 'I met this girl in here-'

'Oh yeah?'

'Yeah, and she's screwed up, as screwed up as me, but I don't look at that as an insult. I look at that as a chance to connect.'

'Yeah, well.'

'Kids are screwed up in this world. I'd rather be with someone screwed up and open about it than somebody perfect and... you know... ready to explode.'

'I'm sorry, Dariez.' Kristopher looks at me deep and holds out a hand for me to slap. 'I'm sorry I was a bitch to you.'

'You were a bitch.' I slap his hand. 'This album partly makes up for it. Just, don't do it again.' 'All right.' He nods.

We stand still a minute. We haven't moved from the crux of the hallways near the entrance of Six North. The double doors that I came in through are eight feet behind him.

'Well, listen,' he says. 'Enjoy the record. And- hey, they have a record player in here?'

'They still smoke in here, Kristopher. They're kind of back in time-.'

'Enjoy it and be in touch, and I'm sorry once again. I guess you won't be chilling for a while.'

'I don't know. I may never be chilling again.'

'Did you almost kill yourself to get in here?' Kristopher asks.

'That's what Emmah told me.'

'Yeah.'

'Why?'

'Because I wasn't capable of dealing with the real world.'

'Dariez, don't kill yourself, okay?'

'Thanks.'

'Just... don't.'

'I won't.'

'I'll see you soon, boy.'

Kristopher turns, and the nurses open the door for him. He's not a bad boy. He's just someone who hasn't had his stay on Six North yet. I take the record to Paullie to store behind the nurses' station.

Six North doesn't need a PA system, because of President Armelio, but it does have one, used regularly for the simple and rhythmic messages of 'Lunch is served,' 'Medication,' and 'All smokers to the smoking lounge; smokers, get your smokes.' This afternoon it pipes up with a longer message, courtesy of Monieec.

'Ladies and gentlemen, this afternoon our patient Dariez Gilner, who is leaving tomorrow, is going to be drawing his artwork for everyone on the floor. If you'd like your piece of Dariez's art, come to the end of the hallway by the dining room.

End of the dining-room hallway, five minutes. Have fun!'

I sit down in the back most chair, by the window that peers out over the avenue that crosses the street I live on, so close to my real life. I look over at my conference chair where I meet with my parents and Joy. I have a second chair set up in front of me as an art desk, with stacks of board games on it and a chessboard on top. It's a little flimsy, but it'll do.

President Armelio is the first to approach. He strides up, barrel-chested and sure of himself, like a torpedo. 'Hey, buddy, this is great! You going to make me one of your heads with the maps inside?'

'That's right.'

'Well let's go, buddy. I isn't got all day!'

Right. Armelio is going to have to be done fast because he is fast. I sketch the outline of his head and shoulders without a second thought and start in on his brain map. Highways, that's what Armelio has in his head-six-lane highways running parallel, streaking through a city, with purpose and minimal on-ramps. He doesn't have any quiet little streets or parks; it's highways and a grid, and no rivers either.

The highways hardly even connect because- Armelio doesn't mix up his thoughts; he has one and does it and then he moves on to the next. It's a great way to live. Especially when the biggest thought is wanting to play cards. Cards have to be represented in Armelio's brain somewhere. So, I sketch some streets into an ace of spades right in the middle- it's not a great ace of spades, but Armelio gets it.

'Spades! Buddy, I crush you in spades.'

I put my initials on it, big and bold, 'CG' like 'computer-generated.'

'I'm going to keep this, for real,' Armelio says. 'You a good boy, Dariez.' He shakes my hand. 'You want my number for when you go?'

'Sure-' I take out a piece of paper.

'It's an adult home,' Armelio says. 'You're going to have to ask for Spyros, which is my other name.' He gives me the number and moves aside, and there's Ebony, with her cane and her velvet pants, smacking her lips.

'I heard... that you were making your brains for kids,' she says.

'That's right! And you know who the first person who said they were brains was?'

'Me!'

'Absolutely. Now, look-' -I gesture at my stack of work on the floor- 'now I've got all this.'

'So-o- I get paid, right?' Ebony laughs.

'Not quite; I haven't made it yet. As an artist.'

'I know. It's tough.'

'So-o- you just get a brain map for yourself, okay?'

'Good!'

I trace her head freehand, looking at her, not the paper. I look down and it's pretty good. Ebony's brain ... what's in there? A lot of circles, for all the buttons she stole. She was a nut with those buttons. Didn't mess around. Quite a schemer. And with all of her gambling skills, she needs to have a Strip, like Vegas. So-o- I get a big boulevard in the middle and lots of traffic circles around it, with circular parks, circular malls, little circle lakes. It comes out looking less like a city and more like a necklace with a central band and tons of bunched-up jewels hanging off.

'It's pretty!' She says.

'And you're done.' I hand it to her.

'You like doing these, huh?'

'Yeah. It helps, you know... with my depression. I came in here with depression.'

'Imagine having depression when you were eleven years old,' Ebony says. 'If all my children were in this hall, this hall would be full up, I tell you.'

'You have kids?' I ask, keeping my voice down.

'I had thirteen miscarriages,' she says. 'Imagine that.' And she looks at me without any of the humor or attitude that she usually puts on, just with big wide eyes and empty questions.

'I'm so sorry,' I say.

'I know. I know you are. That's the thing.'

Ebony shuffles away showing off her portrait ('That's me! See? Me!') She doesn't leave a phone number. Humble is next.

'All right, boy, what kind of scam you got going on here?'

'It's nothing.' I start in on Humble's bald head. Bald heads are easy. You know, if I had to right now, I think I could handle the lower tip of Knox. I look at

Humble. He raises his eyebrows at me. 'Make me look good, all right?'

I laugh- inside Humble's head is industrial chaos.

I don't make any small blocks, just big ones-the kind of blocks where you'd find lumber shops and factories and bars where Humble would hang out and work. I put the ocean in there, to represent his hometown, Bensonhurst, which borders the ocean, where he hooked up with all those girls way back when. Then I splash it with highways, erasing the streets and putting them over the top, throwing in crazy interchanges for no reason, making the whole thing look violent and random, but also powerful and true-the kind of mind that could come up with some great stuff if you harnessed it right. When I'm done, I look up.

'I guess it's okay.' He shrugs.

I chuckle. 'Thanks, Humble.'

'I want you to remember me,' he says. 'No joke. When you're a big-time- artist or whatever, you got to invite me to one of the parties.'

'It's a deal,' I say. 'But how am I going to be in touch?'

'Oh, right-I got a number!' Humble says. 'I'm going to be staying in Seaside Paradise; it's the same home that Armelio is going to, but I'm going to be on a different floor.' He gives me the number; I put it on the same sheet as Armelio's.

'You're not going to be in touch,' Humble says.

'I will,' I say.

'No, you won't; I can tell. Mais c'est d'accord. You have a lot going for you. Just don't burn out again.' We shake hands. Up next is

Joy. 'Hey, girl!'

'Don't you dare start calling me that? This is very nice of you to do.'

'Least I could do. They're all such cool kids.'

'You're like a celebrity now. Everyone wants to know if I'm your girlfriend.'

'And what do you tell them?'

'No!' And then I walk away.'

'Good call.'

'So-o- what are you trying to pull? You already made one of these for me. You just said it wasn't finished.'

I pull out the one I made for her, with the boy and girl connected by the bridge, and write my phone number on the back of it.

'Oh my gosh.'

'Now it's done.' I smile, standing up. I lean in and whisper: 'It took me like twice as long as any of the others. And I'll make you an even better one when I get out-'

She pushes me away. 'Yeah, like I want your stupid art.'

'You do.' I lean back. 'I saw how you looked at it before.'

'I'll keep it to make you feel good,' she says. 'That's it.'

'Fine.' She leans in and kisses my cheek. 'Thank you, for real.'

'You're welcome. Hey, what are you doing tonight?' 'Well... I thought I'd be hanging out in the psych hospital. What about you?'

'I've got big plans,' I say. 'We've got a movie coming in-'

'Right, I'm not seeing that stupid movie.'

'I know.' I drop to a whisper. 'But when it's halfway done, do you want to meet in my room?'

'You're kidding.'

'No. Seriously.'

'Your roommate will be there! He's always there!'

'Trust me. Come to the room.'

'Are you going to try and make out with me?'

'If you must know? Yes.'

'I appreciate your honesty. We'll see.'

I hug her; she holds the brain map with her hands wrapped around me. 'And I already have your number,' I say.

'You don't get any second chances if you lose it,' she says. 'I don't give that number out twice.'

I take a quick wanting look at her as we pull away from each other and she moves off to the side.

Joy is next.

'Who's that behind you?'

'Huh, who do you think?' Joy answers.

'Come on up together, boys. I'll do you both at once.' 'Cool,' Joy says, standing off to the side. Joy stands next to him and I start drawing them, their shaggy hair and baggy clothing making for great outlines.

'So-o- he's drawing us?' Joy asks Joy.

'Be quiet, all right?'

'Where did you boys hang out?' I ask Joy, not looking up from the paper. 'Back when you were garbage-heads?'

'What? You're going to draw that?'

'No.' I look up. 'I'm just curious. What neighborhood?'

'It was the Lower East Side, but don't draw the Lower East Side,' says Joy. 'I don't want to go back there.'

'All right, fair enough. Where do you want to live?' 'On the Upper East Side, with all the rich kids,' Joy answers.

'Huh, me too,' says Joy.

'Wait, no, you're getting a guitar,' I say.

'Oh, cool.'

I start on Joy's and Joy's brains. With Joy, it's fun to do a guitar in a street grid—some diagonal streets meeting for the body and then a big wide boulevard for the neck, a park for the head. Then I turn to Joy. I know the Upper East Side pretty well; it's in Knox and the big thing that it has is Central Park, so I draw that on the inside left of his head. Then I put in the stately grid of rich streets. I know the

Guggenheim Museum is somewhere up there; I mark that with an arrow and then I put an 'X' right next to it, on a corner where an apartment probably costs \$20 million, and write Joy's pad. 'Joy's pad! That's right! That's where I'm headed.' He raises his arms. 'Moving on up.' 'Enjoy.' I hand them the piece.

'Who gets what?' Joy asks. 'You want us to rip it apart?'

'No, boy, we're supposed to keep it together because we're friends,' says Joy. 'I'll make a photocopy.'

'Where's the photocopy machine in here?'

'There isn't one! I'll do it when I get out.'

'Where's that going to leave me?'

'With a copy!'

'I don't want a copy!'

'Would you listen to this boy? Nothing's good enough for him—'

'Hey, Joy,' I interrupt. 'Anyway, I can get yours and Joy's phone numbers to talk to you after you leave?'

Joy starts to say something, but she leans in and stops him:

'It's not a good idea, Dariez.'

'What? Why?'

He sighs. 'I've been in and out of this place a lot, right?'

'Yeah.'

'There are good things about this place; I mean, the food is the best around; there are good kids here... but it's still not a place to meet kids.'

'Why not? I met you boys and you're cool!' 'Yeah, well, all the worse, then, when you try to call me or team up and find out that we've OD 'ed, or been shot, or come back here even worse, or just disappeared.'

'That's a pretty negative view.'

'I've seen it before. You just remember us, okay? We meet in the outside world; it just ruins it. You'll be embarrassed by me and me...' He smiles. '... I might be embarrassed by me, too. And I might be embarrassed by you if you don't keep your stuff together.'

'Thanks. You sure no numbers?'

Joy shakes my hand. 'If we need to, we'll meet.'

Joy shakes my hand. 'What he said.' The last boy in line is My-a Joy.

'I tell you, what'd I say? You play those numbers-' 'It'll come to Ya!' I answer.

'It the truth!' He grins.

Ah, My-a Joy. What's in My-a Joy's brain? Chaos. I do up his nearly bald head and shoulders and then start putting the most complicated, unnecessary, wild highways through him from ear to ear. I connect them in intricate spaghetti ramps. In one nexus, five highways meet; I have to erase and redraw the ramps a few times. Then I put in the grid-a grid laid out by a hyperactive designer, with blocks going in all different directions.

When My-a Joy's brain map is done it might look like the best-a catalog of a schizophrenic mind, but one that works somehow.

'Here you go,' I tell him. He's sitting in a seat that he took next to me to watch me work.

'It'll come to Ya!' he says and takes the map. I want him to finally open up, to call me Dariez, to tell me that we came in together, but he's still My-a Joy- his vocabulary is still limited.

We sit back in our respective chairs; I doze off a bit. Making art on devoid is tiring. But the last thing I see before I go to sleep is My-a Joy unfolding his brain map next to me and comparing it with Ebony, who says, of course, hers is a lot prettier. That's not a bad thing to go to sleep to.

'Dariez, are you okay?' Mom asks. I jolt up and I have a momentary seizure that it was all a dream, all of it-the whole Sixth North bit-but then I wonder, where would the dream start? If it were a nightmare, it would have to have started somewhere before, I got bad; it would be like a yearlong dream. You don't have those. And if it were a good dream, that would mean I was still back where it started, leaning over my parents' toilet or lying in bed listening to my heart. I didn't need that. 'Yeah! I'm-whoa.' I sit up. They're all there- Dad, Mom, Sarah.

'Are you forcing yourself to sleep?' Mom asks. 'Are you depressed?'

'Are you on drugs?' Sarah asks. 'Can you hear me?'

'I was taking a nap! Jeez!'

'Oh, okay. It's at six o'clock.'

'Wow, I was asleep for a while. I was drawing my brain maps for kids.'

'Oh, boy,' says Dad. 'This doesn't sound good.' 'What are brain maps?' Sarah asks.

'That's her art,' says Mom. 'This is why he wants to change schools. Making this art makes you happy, right Dariez?'

'Yeah, want to see?'

'Absolutely.'

I take the stack from beside me and pass it around. This is really what I was creating the stack for, I think; to show my parents. 'Some of the best were the ones I just did, for the patients.' 'Very original,' Dad says.

'I like this one,' says Sarah, pointing at the pig with quasi- Pittsburgh inside him.

'You put a lot of time- into these, I see,' Mom says.

'Right, that's the thing: they don't take me much time-, I explain. 'I'm starting to get a little bored of them, actually; I want to move to something else.' 'So how are you feeling, Dariez?' Dad puts the stack back on the floor.

'You look a lot better,' Mom says.

'I do?'

'Yeah,' Sarah says. 'You don't look all freaky as much.'

'I used to look freaky?'

'She doesn't mean freaky," Mom tells us both. 'She just means that when you were down, you looked a little under the weather.

Isn't that right, Sarah?'

'No, he looked freaky.'

'A flat affect, that's what the doctors call it.' I smile. 'Right, well you don't have that as much anymore,' Sarah says.

'So-o- you want to quit school?' Dad brings us back to the real deal stuff.

'I don't want to quit.' I turn to him. 'I want to transfer.'

'But that means quitting the school you're currently at-'

'He can't handle the other school!' Sarah says. 'Look at-'

'Hold on a second. I can talk,' I say. 'Boys.' I look at all three of them in turn. 'One thing that they do in here gives you a lot of time- to think. I can't explain it; once you come in, time- just slows down-'

'Well, you don't have any interruptions, that's probably it-'

'Also, I think the clocks are a little off-'

I wave my hand. 'Point is, you have time- to think about how you got here. Because obviously, nobody wants to come back. I don't want to come back'

'Good. Me neither,' says Dad. 'What I said the last time-, about actually wanting to be here; that was a joke.'

'Right. Hey, did you bring the movie?'

'Of course. I can watch some of it with you, right?'

'Absolutely. So anyway, I've been thinking about when things started getting bad for me. I realized: it started after I got into high school.' 'Uh-huh,' Mom says.

'That was the happiest moment of my life. The happiest day. And from there on it was all downhill.' 'Right, this happens to a lot of adults,' Dad says. 'Will you stop interrupting him?' Sarah interrupts. Dad folds his hands behind him and straightens his back.

'It's okay, Sarah. I just... I think I was concentrated on getting into Executive Pre-Professional because it was like, a challenge. I wanted to have that feeling of triumph. I never really thought about the fact that I'd have to, you know, go to the school.'

'So, you want to do art,' Mom says.

'Well, let's consider it. I never really liked math. I was good at it, but only because I liked having basic information in front of me to get through, to reach that feeling of accomplishment. I never really liked English. This'- I point at the brain maps-'this is something different. This is something I love. So, I'd better do it.'

'You'd better love it,' Dad says. 'Because it's a hard life. It's mostly the artists who end up in places like this.'

'Well, then he has to be an artist; that's where he is!' Sarah says.

'Heh. It's pretty simple.' I stand up. 'Take a look around. I tried to go to the best high school in the city.

And this is where I ended up.'

'True.' Mom looks behind her. Solomon rushes across our field of view.

'If I don't make some kind of big change, I'm going to come out of here wondering how anything is different from before, and I'm going to end up right back here.'

'Right,' says Mom. 'I'm with you, Dariez.'

'What art school are you going to go to?' Dad asks. 'Knox Arts Academy? It's easy to transfer to with my grades-'

'Oh, but Dariez, that's the school for kids who are all screwed up,' Dad says.

I look at him. 'Yeah? Dad?' I raise my wrist, show him the bracelets. I have pride in them now. They're true, and kids can't screw with them. And when you say the truth you get stronger.

Dad stands still for a minute, looks down at his feet, and then looks up. 'Okay,' he says. 'We'll do whatever we have to do.

You have to stay in school until you transfer, though.

That's going to be... until the end of the year at least, I think.'

'I'll handle it,' I say.

'I know you will. We'll help.'

'Dinner, get ready for dinner!' President Armelio walks toward us. 'Dariez and his family, dinner is almost here!'

'How've you been eating?' Mom asks as I stretch my legs.

'I have been. That's good.'

'It's wonderful, Dariez.'

'Okay, so I'm leaving the DVD here with you.' Dad hands it to me. 'And I'm going to be back to watch it when you're done with dinner. When will that be?'

'Seven is good. But visiting hours end at eight. You won't get to watch the whole thing.'

'We'll see how long I can stay. You might be surprised.'

I swallow. I don't want him sticking around that long.

I'll make sure Paullie gets him out.

'I'll see you tomorrow,' Mom says. 'The staff tells us we're picking you up early in the morning before I go to work.' 'I'll be ready.'

'We've got lots of good food at home.'

'I'll see you when I come home from school.' Sarah hugs my waist. 'I'm so happy you're back.' I pat her head. 'Are you embarrassed by this place?'

'Yeah, but whatever.'

'I am too,' I say. 'It's just a good type of embarrassment.'

Mom and Dad are dressed up to bring me out; I'm wearing what I wore all the time- in here-some khaki pants and my tie-dyed T-shirt and my dress shoes, my Rockport's, the ones that kids complimented me on every so often, that made me feel like a professional patient. Mom never brought a change of clothes.

They're here early because Dad has to work; he wanted to see me before he left. Mom is staying home today to see that I'm all right. Then, tomorrow, Friday, I'm back at school, but with the official notice that I can pop into the nurse's office at any time- if I feel depressed. I don't have to go to class for the next week; that's school policy. I'm encouraged to go but they don't want to overwhelm me. It's a good deal.

It's 7:45 AM I've taken my last vitals-120 / 80- and I'm standing at the crux of the hall by the nurses 'office, looking at the double doors I came in five days ago. It seems

like five days; it doesn't seem too long or too short; it seems like I spent the Bliss- here that I spent. Kids are always talking about really- shocking quotes, really- information, really- news-but in here I think I had really- REALLY-. Armelio shakes my hand a final time-.

'Good luck, buddy.'

Humble says I should stay for a little longer.

'You're going to lose it on the outside, boy.'

Joy mumbles at me. It's too early for him. The Professor tells me to keep doing my art.

Paullie says he heard from Neil that I was thinking of volunteering and he hopes to see me sometimes.

My-a Joy ignores me completely.

Ebony says to be careful of liars and cheats and to always respect children.

Joy pops out of her room at 7:50, just as breakfast is rolling in and my parents are stepping out of the nurses' office where they were signing papers. 'I'm out in the afternoon,' she says. She's wearing sweatpants and a T-shirt. 'Call me tonight?' 'Sure.' I touch her number in my pocket, next to her two notes that I saved.

'How are you feeling?'

'I'm feeling like I can handle it.'

'Me too.'

'You're a cool girl,' I say.

'Your kind of a dork, but with potential,' she says.

'That's all I'm trying for.' 'Dariez?' Mom asks.

'Oh, hey boys, ah, this is Joy. We got to be friends here.' 'I saw you last night,' Dad says, shaking her hand.

'A pleasure to meet you,' says Mom. Neither of them takes a second look at the cuts on her face. My parents have some class.

'Good to meet you too,' she says.

'Are you still in high school?' Dad asks.

'Delfin,' she says.

'A lot of pressure, huh,' says Mom.

'Yeah.'

'I think they might have to change the whole system. Look, two kids like you, smart young kids, sent in here because of pressure.'

'Mom.'

'I'm serious. I'm going to write to my congressperson about it.' 'Mom.'

'I'll go,' Joy says. 'See you Dariez.' And she dips her leg up behind her as she turns away and flicks a wave at me-that counts as a kiss, I think. If my parents weren't here that would be a kiss.

'Are you ready?' Mom asks.

'Yeah. Bye, everybody!'

'Wait!' From down the hall, Joy moves forward as fast as he allows himself to, which isn't very fast, sort of like a speed walk, and hands me the record.

'Thank you, Dariez. This boy, your son,' he turns to my parents, 'he has helped me.'

'Thank you,' Mom and Dad say.

I hug Joy and take in his smell one last time-.

'Good luck, boy.'

'As you go through life, you think of me and hope that

I am better.'

'I will.'

We separate and Joy migrates toward the dining room and the smell of food.

I look at my parents. 'Let's go.'

It's incredibly simple. The nurses open the doors for us and there I am outside, looking at the 'Sh-h! Healing in Progress' poster I saw when I came in. The bank of elevators stands sentry in front of us.

'Girls,' I tell them. 'Can you go home yourselves, and I'll walk after you in like one minute?'

'Why? Are you okay?'

'I just want to walk by myself a little.'

'Think things over?'

I look at the table as they leave. I need some medication. I look up and see patients lined up at the desk next to the phone, the nurses' station, eagerly passing the times in their little way - President Armelio rocks from foot to foot, Joy - one holds the hand who refuses to work - before she gets pills in small plastic cups. Beth/Charles and Becca finally appear at the end of the line, chatting and gesticulating, and Beth/Charles blows me a kiss. I don't think I need to stand behind them now. Also, I only take Zoloft in the morning; If they wanted me on something at noon, they would have told me.

When Becca and J/C are gone and I still sit at the table in shock, another sign appears on the window, this one from below as if heaved by spider threads:

DON'T WORRY. HE/SHE/IT GETS THEM ALL, WELCOME TO SIX NORTH!

When I go out to find her, she's not there. I ask the nurse who does her delivery duties if I need medication, and she says I haven't scheduled any. I ask them if I can have any. She asks what I need her for. I tell her to deal with this crazy place. She says that if they had pills for it, they wouldn't need such places, would they?

"So, how is it?" Ask Mom, a tote bag with toiletries in her hand, next to her dad and Sarah. We are at the end of the right H-leg, I on a chair facing the three. Visiting hours are on Saturday from 12:00 to 8:00.

Sarah won't let me answer.

"It's as if someone had flown over the cuckoo's nest!" she says excitedly. She wears jeans and a fake suede jacket for Six North. "I mean, all these kids look like... Serious lunatics!"

"Sh-hh," I tell her. "My-a Joy is right there." My-a Joy stands behind her at the window, sitting as always with folded arms, out of his shirt and in a clean navy blue robe.

"Who is my joy?" Mom asks eagerly.

"The boy I came in with downstairs. I think he's schizophrenic."

"Doesn't that mean he has two personalities?" Sarah asks and turns around. "He's not just Joy-a; he's also Molly or something."

"No, you'd be surprised, that's different," I raise my eyebrows. "Joy-a my-a is just a little... scattered." Joy-a sees me looking at him and smiles. "I'll tell you, you're playing these numbers, it's going to come to you!" he chirps.

"I think he's talking about lottery numbers," I explain. "I tried to figure it out."

"Oh my God." My sister covers her face.

"No, Sarah, don't do that, watch out," Mom says. She turns around. "Thank you, Joy."

"I tell you, it is the truth!"

"I like this place," Mom turns around. "I think it's full of good kids."

"I like it." Dad leans in. "When can I join?" But when no one laughs, he leans back, folds his hands, sighs.

"Is this a transvestite?" Sarah asks. J/C is down the hall, about forty feet away, and I don't know for my life how Sarah suspects something out there that I couldn't see up close.

"No, now listen-"

"Is that it?" Dad blinks.

"Boys!"

"Transvestite!" My-a Joy shrieks. He does it at the highest level - I've never heard him so loud. The whole hall, which admittedly consists only of me, my family, J/C, and the older professor girl with the glasses, stops and begins.

"I tell you, it will come: it will come to you!"

J / C begins to approach us. "Are we talking about myself?" he asks in his boy's voice. He waves to my-a Joy.

"Hey, my joy." He comes directly to me and my sister.

"Dariez, your name is, isn't it?" "Yes," I murmur.

"Wow, is this your family?"

"Yes." I tap my palm on each of them - it's at the level of the ruffles on his pants. "My father" - he sticks out his lips - "my mother" - she nods, everyone is smiling - "and my sister Sarah" - she stretches out a hand.

"Oh my God, so beautiful!" J/C says. "I'm Charles." He trembles with everyone. "You will take really good care of your son here. He's a good boy."

"How about you; What can you expect?" Dad asks. I kick him. Does he not know what not to ask?

"It's okay, Dariez!" J/C touches my shoulder. "My goodness, did you just kick your father? I've never done that before." He turns to Dad: "I have bipolar, sir, and I had an episode, and they brought me here. I'm going back to Upstate today. But the doctors here are very attentive and the processing time is great." "Wonderful," says Mom.

"Of course," J/C gestures to us, "it's much better if you have family support. They want to make sure they release you into a safe environment. I didn't." He shakes his head. "Dariez, you are very lucky." I look at it: my safe environment. I honestly wouldn't be surprised to find one of them in Six North. "Well, I'll leave you, guys, to your afternoon," says J/C. He slowly walks away.

My-a Joy makes an indecipherable high wailing noise.

"That's applause, isn't it?" Ask Dad and throw a thumb behind him. "I like that."

"They're great pants," says Sarah.

"Okay, so let's get down to business, Dariez," Mom says.

"What do you need?"

"I need a phone card. I need you, guys, to take my phone and leave it plugged in so the calls are registered. I need some clothes, like what you brought before, Mom. I don't need towels; You have them. Magazines would be good. And pencil and paper, that would rock." "It's simple. What kind of magazines?"

"Science magazines! He loves them," Dad says.

"He may not be ready for science magazines right now," Mom replies. "Do you want something lighter?" "Do you want Star?" Sarah asks.

"Sarah, why would I want Star?"

"Because it's great." She reaches into her purse — her first, black, one recently bought by mom — and rolls out a shiny pink monster, complete with images of a celebrity breast's recent spectacular outing in public.

I hold it up for my joy.

"Mm-hm!" he says. I'll tell you! I'll tell you! It comes to yah!

"That's very nice," says the professor with bugged eyes, of whom I somehow did not know that she had wandered directly behind me.

"Oh, excuse me," she looks up. "I didn't listen to your conversation at all." She goes to her room.

"Um... ", says Sarah.

"I'll take it," I say. I put it under my seat. "I think the floor will enjoy it."

"Is it just me, or are you starting to develop some kind of loyalty to the tribe?" Dad asks.

"Sh-hh." I smile.

"Dariez, the next work plan: Did you call Dr. Jarnerny?"

"No."

"Did you call Dr. Ross?"

"No."

"Well, they both need to know where you are, for health insurance reasons and because they're your doctors and take care of you, and that's going to be very important to them."

"Your numbers are in my phone."

"Well, let's call them; we picked up your phone from the front," Mom reaches into her pocket.

"No!" Dad grabs her hands. "Don't take out the phone!"

"Don't be ridiculous, honey. Dariez is the one who shouldn't have it, not us."

"Well, uh, I don't think we want to get our son into trouble. That's not the kind of place you want to be sent on a break."

I look at him.

"That's not so funny."

"What? Oh, I'm sorry," he says.

"No, Dad, seriously. It isn't... I mean, it's serious business."

"I'm just trying to lighten the mood, Dariez-"

"Well, that's what you always try. Let's just not do it here."

Dad nods, looks me dead in the eyes; Slowly and regretfully, he banishes all the smiles and jokes from his face, and for once he is just my father watching his son who has fallen so low. "All right, then." We stay calm.

"Is that the truth, my joy?" I ask, without looking at him.

"It's the truth, and it comes to yah!" I smile.

"We'll take care of the phone later," Dad sums up.

"Next work plan?" Ask Mom.

"How long will I be in here, I think."

"How long do you think?"

"A few days. But I haven't seen the doctor yet.

Dr. Mahmoud."

"Right, how is he? Is he good?"

"I don't know, Mom. You've met him as long as I have. He'll be doing the rounds soon, and I'll talk to him."

"I think you have to stay here until you get better, Dariez. You don't want to get out early and you have to come back; This is how you get "into the system".

"Right. I won't. I think that's a big part of places like this: they do them so you don't want to come back.

"What's the food like?" Sarah asks.

"Oh, I almost forgot," I look at my family. I know I shouldn't be proud of it; It's really sad that this is my big achievement of the day... but I ate everything at lunch."

"Did you?" Mom gets up, pulls me up and hugs me.

"Yes." I retire. "It was a chicken. I ate two portions of it."

"Girl, that's a big one," Dad gets up and shakes my hand.

"No, it's not, it's really easy, everyone does it, but for me it's like a stupid triumph-"

"No," Mom says, looking me in the eye. "What is a triumph is that you woke up this morning and decided to live. This is a triumph. That's what you did today." I nod to her. As I said, I'm not a screamer.

"Yes, because if you had died..." Sarah says, "That would have been." She rolls her eyes and hugs my leg.

I sit down again. "Once the food is in front of you, it's just that you're eating. I mean, they're professionals here; They know how to take children with them and put them in a routine that gives them something to do."

"That's right," says Mom. "So, what do you do now?"

"I think there are activities-"

"Hey, Dariez, is this your family?" President Armelio enters the stage. His half harelip and hair shock my sister, but his relentless enthusiasm for simple – I don't know-life – would beat the fear out of anyone.

He shakes hands and says, we are a beautiful family and I am a good boy, he notices.

"Dariez is my friend! Hey, buddy, do you want to play cards?"

President Armelio holds up a deck of cards as if he had just fished it out of the sea.

"Yes, absolutely!" I say. I get up. When was the last time I played cards? Before the test, probably before high school.

"All right!" Armelio says. "My kind of boy! Let's do it. I searched and searched: No one here likes to play cards like me! What do you want to play? Spades? I'll crush you, buddy; I will crush you.'

I look at my parents. "We'll call you," Mom says. "And hey - what about sleeping?"

"I'm wired right now," I say. "But I'm going to crash. I'm starting to get a headache."

"Headache? Buddy, as soon as I crush you into spades, you're going to have a much bigger headache!" Armelio makes his way to the dining room to set up the cards.

"You see," Sarah says, hugging me.

"Bye, son." Dad shakes my hand.

"I love you," Mom says. "I'll call you with the doctors' phone numbers."

"And bring a phone card."

"And I bring a phone card. You'll stay tuned, Dariez." "Yes, I will." And once they're around the bend, I go to the dining room and learn how to play spades for the rest of the afternoon, which Armelio crushes me.

I'm afraid to talk on the phone. The phone on Six North is a hustle and bustle, with Joy and the blond burnt-out guy I learn is called Joy taking calls from, I assume, their respective female colleagues. Joy happily starts his calls and says:

"Baby" often, but then he gets angry and slams the phone shut and says "bitch"; Paullie tells him not to do that; Joy leans back with a particularly strong aura of non-care.

Five minutes later, another call comes for him, and he is back at "Baby". However, he doesn't even answer the phone; President Armelio has this task.

When he answers, he always says "Jack's Pub" and then finds whoever the call is for.

In a rare moment when Joy and the girl, whose name I can't remember, leave the phone open, I walk towards it with the phone card that mom brought me twenty minutes after she left.

Dad and Sarah. I pick up and hear the dialing tone, dial the 800 number for the calling card... and then stop. I can't do it.

I just don't want to deal with it.

Children on the outside world don't know what happened to me, I'm in a kind of stasis right now. Things are under control. But the dam will break. Even if I'm only here until Monday, the rumors will fly and the homework will pile up.

Where is Dariez?

He is sick.

He's not sick, he has alcohol poisoning because he can't handle real alcohol.

I heard that he took someone's pills and freaked out. I heard that he realized that he is gay and deals with it.

I heard that his parents were sending him to another school.

He couldn't handle it here anyway. He was always such a loser.

He freaks out in front of his computer. He can't move or anything. It is catatonic.

He woke up thinking he was a horse.

Well, whatever, what's question three?

There were two messages on my phone when I walked in, and now there are probably more, each requiring a callback, and the callback may have required another tentacle callback – which took me right back to where I was last night. I can't go there, so I'll wait. I can wait five minutes. But then Joy is at stake. And then I wait another five minutes. And the news is piling up. And that doesn't even count emails. What hellish assignments did my teachers send by email?

"Excuse me, are you using the phone?" asks the giant black girl with the stick as I stare at her.

"Yes, uh." I pick up the phone. "Yes. Yes, I am."

"Okay." She smiles, rolls her gums and shows no teeth. I start dialing, enter my PIN, enter my number.

"Please enter your password and then press the pound sign."

I obey.

"They have three new messages." One more than before. Not so bad.

"First new message: Message marked as urgent." Uh-oh.

"Hey, Dariez, it's Emmah, me just, um... We talked, and you sounded really bad. I just wanted to make sure you're doing everything right, and since you're not answering - it's like two in the morning, I mean, why should you answer? But I'm kind of worried that maybe you did something stupid because of me. Don't. I mean, it's cute, but don't. Okay, that's it, I'm with Kristopher, he's a total dick. Bye."

'To delete this message-'

I met 7.

"Next message."

"Dariez, it's Kristopher, call me back, son! Let's chill-' I hit 7-7.

"Next message." "Hi, Mr. Gilner, this is your science teacher, Mr. Reynolds. I got your phone number from the student directory. We need to talk about the lack of your labs; I miss five of them-' 7-7.

"End of news."

I put the phone away as if it were a dangerous animal. I pick up again, call home. I can't stop now.

"Sarah, can you get Emmah and Kristopher's phone numbers out of my cell? And check out Knox's recent missed calls; I need to call my science teacher." "Sure. What does it look like over there?"

I look to the left. A Hasidic Jewish boy, complete with white pants, yarmulke, tassels hanging from him, braided hair and sandals, hurries down the hallway towards me. Shreds of red food litter his dark beard, and his eyes are wild and confused. He says to me, 'I am Solomon.'

"Um, I heard about you. I'm Dariez, but I'm on the phone." I cut the phone.

"I ask you to keep it quiet! I'm trying to rest!" He turns around and races away, holding his pants.

"O-ooh! Solomon introduced himself to you!" cries the girl with the stick. That's big." "It's normal," I say to my sister.

"Okay, here." She gives me Emmah's and Kristopher's and the teacher's numbers; I write them down on a piece of paper that Paullie gave me. I should have known that beforehand. Emmah looks well written - healthy and useful. Science teachers look jagged and hateful. Maybe I won't be able to call him until tomorrow.

"Thank you, Sarah-bye."

I hang up and look at the lady with the stick.

"Hey, I'm Dariez," I say.

"Ebony." She nods. We shake hands.

"Ebony, it's cool if I just make one more call?"

"Of course."

I dial 800, enter my PIN, dial Emmah.

"Hello?"

"Hey, Emmah, it's me."

"Dariez, where are you?"

It's funny how kids ask that as soon as they get you on the phone. I think it's a byproduct of cell phones: kids — especially girls and moms — want to pin you into physical space. The fact is that you could be anywhere on a cell phone and it shouldn't matter where you are. But it will be the first thing children ask.

"I'm with a friend. In Knox."

I also wonder how ~Sped~ lies cell phones contributed to the world.

"Uh-huh, Dariez. I don't think so."

"What do you mean?" I wipe the sweat from my forehead. The sweat starts again. This is not good. I was sweating in the emergency room, but I wasn't sweating at lunch.

"You're not with a friend. You're probably with a girl."

I look at Ebony. She smiles and leans forward on her cane.

"Yes, absolutely."

"I know you. Last night you had me on the phone; Tonight you're out with a girl."

"Sure, Emmah—"

"Seriously, how are you? Thank you for your callback. I was worried."

"I know I got your message."

"I don't want you to freak out about me. I think you just need some time to decompress a little bit and don't think about me and think about someone else. Because I know we might be good for each other, but I'm with someone else, you know?"

"Right... um... I didn't freak out about you last night."

"No?"

"No, I'm freaked out about much bigger things. I had a kind of crisis and wanted to reach someone who understood it."

"But you asked me if we could ever have been together."

"Well, I tried to sort that out because Ya' know... I wanted to do something stupid."

She lowers her voice: "Kill yourself?"

"And."

"You wanted to kill yourself because of me?"

"No!" I shudder. "I was just in a really bad place, and you were a part of it because you're a part of my life, just like Kristopher is a part of it and my family is a part of it, but I thought you could sort something out for me before I..."

"Dariez, I'm so flattered."

"No, you have the wrong idea. Don't be flattered."

"How could I not be? I've never had a boy who wanted to kill himself for me. It's like the robot thing."

"Emmah, it wasn't about you."

"Are you sure?"

I look down, and the answer is right there in my chest and it bounces back. "Yes. I have bigger problems than you." "Ah, okay."

"And you shouldn't assume that everything revolves around you."

"Whatever. What's wrong with you?"

"Nothing. Now everything is actually much better."

"You're acting like a total dick. Do you want to come out tonight?"

"I can't."

"Did Kristopher call you? We're having a big party at his house."

"Right. I probably won't celebrate for... like... awhile. As always, maybe."

"Is everything alright now?"

"Yes, I'm just... I'm in the process of figuring out a few things."

"At your friend's house."

"Right."

"Are you like in a crack cave or something?"

"No!" I shout, and just then President Armelio comes up to me:

"Hey, buddy, you want to play spades? I will crush you.'

"Not now, Armelio."

"Who is this?" Emmah asks.

"Leave him alone, he'll talk to his girlfriend." Ebony knocks on Armelio with her stick.

"She's not my friend," I whisper to her.

"Who is this?"

"My friend Armelio."

"No, the girl."

"My friend Ebony."

"Where are you, Dariez?"

"I have to go."

"All right..." Emmah grimaces her voice. "I'm glad you do... uh... better." "I feel much better," I say.

It's done, I think. She's done, and you're done with her.

"You see, Dariez." I hang up.

"I think that's over," I say to myself.

Then I decide to announce it to the Chamber: "I think this is over!" Ebony stomps her stick and Armelio claps.

Continued: 3

Something deep in my guts, under my heart, has shifted to the left and settled in a more comfortable place. It's not the shift, but it's a shift. I imagine Emmah with her beautiful face and her little body and black hair and pouting lips and Kristopher's hands everywhere, but also with her smoking weed and the pimples on her forehead and making fun of children all the time and how she is always so proud of how she is dressed. And I imagine it fading.

I play cards with Armelio in the dining room until Joy sticks his head in: "Dariez? At your door does it say that Dr. Mahmoud is your doctor? He makes his rounds."

"I don't want to be here," I tell him at the entrance of my room, where I catch him before he visits Joy.

"I don't think it's the right place for me."

"Of course not," nods Dr. Mahmoud. He's wearing the same suit he had earlier in the day, though that feels like last year. "If you had liked it here, that would be a very bad prognosis!"

"Right." I laugh. "Well, I mean, everyone is friendly, but I feel much better and I think I'm ready to go. Maybe on Monday? I don't want to miss school."

Besides, Doc, right now the phone messages and emails are piling up and the rumors are flying. I just talked to this girl and I was fine - but the tentacles are curled up and the pressure is rising, preparing to pounce on me when I leave. If I'm in here too long, I have so much more to do when I get out.

"We can't rush it," says Dr. Mahmoud. "The important thing is to get better. If you try to leave too early - suddenly, is everything better? We doctors become suspicious."

"Oh. Well, you don't want the doctor who can dismiss you from the psychiatric hospital to become suspicious." "Right. Right now you look much better to me, but maybe that's a wrong recovery."

"A fake shift."

"I'm sorry?"

"A fake shift. That's what I call it. If you think you beat it, but you didn't?" "Exactly. We don't want that."

"So, I'll be here until I have the right shift?"

"I don't follow."

"I will stay here until I am healed?"

"Life is not cured, Mr. Gilner." Dr. Mahmoud leans in. "Life has travelled."

"Okay."

I'm not as impressed by it as he would like. He arches back: "We will not keep you here until you are healed of anything; We'll keep you here until you're stable – we call it "baseline fixing." "Okay, when will my baseline be set?"

"Five days, probably."

One, two, three... "Thursday? I can't wait until Thursday, doctor. I have too much school. That's four days of school. If I miss four days, I'm so behind."

"And my friends..."

"And?"

"My friends will know where I am!"

"Aha. Is that a problem?"

"And!"

"Why?"

"Because I'm here!" I gestured into the hall. Solomon shuffles by very quickly in his sandals and tells someone to be quiet, he tries to rest. "Mr. Gilner." Dr. Mahmoud puts a hand on my shoulder. "They have a chemical imbalance, that's all. If you were diabetic, would you be ashamed of where you were?"

"No, but-"

"If you had to take insulin and quit and were taken to the hospital, wouldn't that make sense?"

"That's different."

"How?"

I sigh. "I don't know how much of it is chemical. I just think depression is a way to cope with the world. For example, some children get drunk, some children take drugs, some children become depressed."

Because there's so much stuff out there that you have to do something to deal with it."

"Ah. That's why you need to be here longer to talk about these things," says Dr. Mahmoud. "You have a psychologist, right?"

Did you call your psychologist?"

Shoot. I knew I was forgetting something.

"You have to call; Your psychologist will come here to meet with you. What's her name? Or his?"

"Dr. Ross."

"Oh!" says Dr. Mahmoud; His lips curl into a distant smile. "Wonderful. Get Andrea down here." "Andrea?" I never knew her first name. She keeps it a secret. It is obscured in all their degrees. She says it's part of politics.

He waves his hand. "Make an appointment with her; Then we are so much closer to creating your treatment plan and getting you out of here as quickly as possible. We'll try for Thursday."

"Not before Thursday."

"No."

"Thursday," I mumble to myself and look up across the room.

Joy is more susceptible lump. "Five days, that's it! Everything will be fine, Mr. Gilner. Your life will wait. You simply participate in the group activities and call Dr. Ross. And if you're rich and successful, don't forget me, okay?"

"Okay."

"Can you please close the door?" Ask Joy from his bed.

"Joy, you're next: how come you're always asleep - sleep - sleep?"

Dr. Mahmoud walks past me. I call Mom to report the news, and then I call Dr. Ross. She says she's sorry I took this turn for the worse, but it's always two steps forward, one step back.

"If that's my only step back," I tell her, "what do I do next: win the lottery and get my TV show?"

That would be a good TV show, I think. A boy wins the lottery in the psychiatric hospital.

Dr. Ross can't come tomorrow because it's Sunday, but she says she'll be there on Monday. I'm surprised by the distinction at the moment. In Six North, there probably won't be much different.

"They say there's going to be a pizza party tonight," Humble tells me over dinner. Dinner consists of chicken tenders with potatoes and salad and a pear. I eat everything. "But that's what they say every night." "What's a pizza party?"

"We all put in the money and get pizza from the neighborhood. It's tough because no one ever has cash. It's like a big deal when we get hot peppers."

"I have eight dollars."

"Sh-h. Don't announce it!" He stops chewing. "The kids in here have no money. I don't have two cents to rub against each other."

I nod. "I've never heard that before."

"No? Do you like it?"

"And."

"How about: I don't have a pot to piss in or a window to throw it out of."

"No."

"What is: I have Jack and shit and Jack has left town." "Heh. No!

Where do you get them all?"

"From the old neighborhood. Enter a ring.

Catch Ya on the other side. It's the best way to talk."

"A ring, what's that call?"

"Don't ask yuppie questions."

Humble scans the room for children they can talk about. He enjoys talking about other children - he just enjoys talking, I've discovered, but he especially enjoys talking about other children, and when he does, he puts on a peculiar kind of voice that is not quite a whisper, but so deeply monotonous that no one notices. He also seems to be able to throw it, so it feels like he's talking into my left ear.

"So, I suppose you've familiarized yourself with our nice clientele here on the floor. President Armelio is the president." He nods over to Armelio, who has first used up his food and gets up to return the tray. "Do you see how fast he eats? If you could use a quarter of its energy, you could power Knox Island. I'm not kidding.

He should work in a place with children like us. He has such a good heart and he is never down."

"Then why is he in here?"

"He's psychotic, of course. You should see him when they brought him in. He shouted his head over his mother.

He is Greek."

"Hm."

"Now there's Ebony, she from. This is the biggest I've ever seen. I don't even get up, but if you were a man, you could lose yourself in it.

It's like having your own church. I think that's why she needs the stick. She is also the only girl I have ever known who wears velvet trousers; I think you have to have such a butt to wear velvet pants.

They just make them extra-extra-big."

"I didn't even notice them."

"Well, give him a while. After a few days you start to notice children's clothes because they all wear the same stuff every day."

"It won't get dirty?"

"They do laundry on Tuesdays and Fridays. Who gave you your tour when you walked in?"

"Joy."

"He should have told you that." Humbly turns his head and then turns around. "Now Joy and she are sitting too" - they sit together at a table, as they were at lunch - these two were some of the biggest methamphetamine addicts in Clarion, period, in the nineties. They were called Fiend One and Fiend Two. The party didn't start until they showed up."

That must have been such a feeling, despite all the drugs, I think. Coming into a house and kids getting up and greeting you: "All right, boy!" "You're here!" "What's wrong?" That was probably just as addictive as the amphetamines. Kids kind of do that with Kristopher.

"What happened to them?" I ask.

"What happens to anyone? They were burned out, lost all their money, ended up here. I have no families, no women - well, I think Joy has one."

"He's on the phone."

"You can't tell that. Children pretend to be on the phone all the time. Like them" - he tilts his head to the girl with the bedbug eyes who was standing behind me when I was talking to my family - "The professor. I caught her talking to Dr. Dial Tone on the phone. She is a university professor. She ended up here because she believes someone tried to

spray her apartment with insecticide. She has newspaper clippings about it and everything."

Humbly turns around: "The black child with the glasses: He looks pretty normal, but he has it bad. You can tell he doesn't come out of his room often. That's because he's afraid gravity will reverse and he will fall into the ceiling. When he goes outside, he needs to be near trees so that in case gravity stops, he has something to hold on to. I think he's about seventeen. Did you talk to him?"

"Don't do it!"

"He doesn't talk. I don't know how much they can do for him."

The boy looks at the ceiling fan above the dining room, shudders and puts food in his mouth. "Then there's my joy.

My-a Joy has been here many times. I've been here for twenty-four days, and I've seen him come and go twice. You seem to like him."

"We came in together."

"He's a cool boy. And he has good teeth."

"Yes, I noticed that."

"Pearl white. Not many kids here have that. I wonder what happened to Ebony's teeth." "What's wrong with them?" I turn around.

"Don't look. She doesn't have one, you didn't notice? She is on a liquid diet. Only gums. I wonder if she sold them, tooth by tooth..."

I bite my tongue. I can't help it. I shouldn't laugh at any of these kids, and neither should Humble, but maybe it's okay, somewhere, somehow, because we enjoy life? I'm not sure. My-a Joy, two tables away, notices my suppressed laughter, smiles at me and laughs herself.

"I said-jah: It's coming to yah!"

"Let's go. What's going on in his head?" Humbly asks.

I can't help it. It's too much. I break down. Juice and chicken-tender pieces spray my plate.

"Oh, I've got you now," Humble continues. "And here comes the guest of honor: Solomon."

The Hasidic Jewish boy comes in and holds up his pants. He still has food in his beard. He grabs his tray and opens a microwave pack of spaghetti and begins to shovel it into his mouth, slurping, moaning swallowing.

"This boy eats once a day, but it's like his last day on earth," Humble says. "I think he's the furthest away of them all. He has like a direct audience with God."

Solomon looks up, turns his head from side to side, and resumes eating.

Humbly falls to a true whisper. "He made a few hundred pills of acid and blew out his pupils. His eyeballs are probably dilated."

"No way."

"Absolutely. It is a certain cult of the Hasidics: the Jewish acid heads. There is a portion of their scriptures that tell them that it is the way to talk to God. But he took it too far."

Solomon gets up, leaves his tray at the table in disgust, and leaves the room with alarming speed.

"He's like the mole boy, back into his hole," Humble says. "The real mole children are the anorexics; You don't even see them."

"How ~Sped~ kids are in here?" I ask.

"They say twenty-five," Humble says. "But that's not counting the stowaways."

I look around. Charles/Beth is not in the room.

"Did he, uh, you knew it, Charles? Has he gone?" "Yes, the tranny is gone. I left this afternoon. Tranny met you?"

"And."

"Paullie lets him do that. Get a kick out of it."

"I can't believe he's just gone. They don't throw a party for you when you leave?"

"No way. Children here don't want to get out. Getting out means going back to the streets or jail or trying to fish their stuff out of a confiscated car, like me. Your kind of situation, with the parents and a house: that's rare. And with so ~Sped~ kids coming and going, we'd be crazy to try a party every time. We would end up like Fiend One and Fiend Two."

My tray is a mess of food splashing out. "You're ruining me, humble," I tell him.

"I know. I'm great - times for everyone. It's a shame I'm in here instead of getting paid for it on stage."

"Why don't you try to go on stage?"

"I'm old."

"I need to get some napkins." I get up and go to Paullie, who hands me a stack. I return, wipe my tray and start with the bulb.

"They have a secret admirer," Humble says. "I should have guessed it. I know how you work."

"Was?"

"She was just here. Look at your chair."

I get up and check it. There is a piece of paper, face down. I turn it around and it says HOPE YOU HAVE A GOOD TIME. VISITING HOURS ARE TOMORROW FROM 19:00-19:05 I DON'T SMOKE. "See? Your little girl with the face of the cut-up just left it." Humbly stands up. "I had a feeling. Now you're starting to look like a rival man. Maybe I need to keep an eye on you."

He puts down his tray and queues for his medication. I fold up the paper and put it in the pocket where my phone used to be.

Part: 12

"Dariez! Hey buddy! Phone!"

I sit with Humble in front of the smoking lounge for the 10 p.m. cigarette break and think about where I was at 10 p.m.: just getting into mom's bed. Humble doesn't smoke, says it's disgusting, but everyone else here does it practically, including the black boy who is afraid of gravity and the big girl Becca, both of whom I thought were minors. Armelio, ebony, joy, joy, joy ... No matter how crazy they all seem, they have no problem wandering up left into the hand that quietly sits down on the sofas to wait for their particular brand of cigarettes, which I learn the hospital doesn't care for – they come in with the packs themselves and the nurses keep them in a special tray. As soon as they pull a cigarette out of their respective packages, they walk one by one through a red door, past nurse Monieec, whose job it is to light them all. When the door closes, the smell comes out from under it and you can hear everyone talking at the same time, as if they had saved their words for a time when there was smoke to send them through.

"How are you on your first day, Dariez?" Nurse Monieec asked me five minutes ago when she closed the door. "You don't smoke, I see."

"No."

"That's good. Terrible habit. And there are so many things happening to children your age."

"A lot of my friends smoke. I only, you know... I never liked it."

"I see you adapt quite well to the ground."

"And."

"Good, good, that's so important. Tomorrow we will talk more about your adjustment and your situation and how you feel."

"Okay."

"You have to take care of this one," Humble said. "He's smart."

"Oh yes?" asked Monieec.

I was looking for the blonde girl, Joy - I had to think about meeting her, but she wasn't there. Neither does Solomon. Next to Humble was the girl he identified as a professor, watching us with her bugged eyes. Without being asked, Humble began talking to me and Monieec about his old friend, who, in his words, "had pig's tail nipples, like curly fries, I'm not kidding you." Monieec laughed and laughed. The professor said Humble was disgusting. Monieec said it was okay to laugh once in a while, and did she have a story to tell?

"Yes, we all know you had some indiscretions in your youth, Professor," Humble blurted out.

The professor got a dreamy look in her eyes. I almost thought she was going to have a seizure. And she said in a light little voice, with a wink at the nose: "I had many boys, but I only had one boy."

I wondered where I had heard this before when Armelio interrupted.

"C'mon buddy! The phone is for you!" "Right." I get up.

"You're lucky, buddy. It's after ten. They usually turn off the phone at ten o'clock."

Turn off the phone. I imagine a big lever in my head, a boy lifting it down.

"What happens if someone calls and the phone is turned off?"

"It rings and rings," Humble shouts, "and the kids know they're no longer in Kansas."

I walk down the hallway. The coin receiver hangs and sways. I record it.

"Hello?"

"Hey, is that the crazy trash can?" It's Kristopher. It's Kristopher, high.

"How did you get that number?" I ask. The boy with the beard, whom I saw rocking in the dining room when I first walked in, walks through the central hall and stares at me.

"My girl gave it to me, what do you think? What's it like in there, buddy?" asks Kristopher.

"How do you know where I am?"

"I checked, boy! Do you think I'm an idiot? I go to the same school as you! I did a reverse number search and found exactly where you are: UMPC hospital, adult psychiatry! Man, how did you get into an adult? Do they serve beer up there?"

"Kristopher, c'mon."

"I'm serious. How about girls? Are there any hot girls around!"

I hear laughter in the background, about rap. "Gim-me the phone!" Richard's high bleating comes through the line.

"Lemme speak!"

Richard comes into focus: "Man, can you get me Vicodin?"

Howls. Laughter. And in the background, Emmah protests: "Guys, don't bother him."

"Gim-me- Dariez, no, seriously." Kristopher is at it again. "I'm sorry, dude. I... But how are you, boy?"

"I am... Okay." I start sweating.

"What happened?"

"I didn't have a good night and checked into the hospital."

"What does it mean, 'didn't have a good night'?"

The boy in my belly is back, tugging at me. I want to vomit on the phone.

"I'm depressed, okay, Kristopher?"

"Yes, I know about what?"

"No, boy, I'm generally depressed. I have clinical depression."

"No way! You're like the happiest boy I know!"

"What are you talking about?"

"That's a joke, Dariez. You're like the craziest person I know. Do you remember the bridge? But you know, the problem is that you don't chill enough. Even when you're here, you're always worried about school or something; You never just sit back and let things slide, you know what I mean? We're having a party tonight – where will you be?"

"Kristopher, who's in the room?"

"Emmah, Richard, Scruggs, uh... my friend Delilah." I don't even know Delilah.

"So, all these kids know where I am now."

"Man, we think it's great where you are! We want to visit!"

"I can't believe you."

"Was?"

"I can't believe you do."

"Don't be a girl. You know, if I was in the psychiatric ward, you'd call me and attack me a little bit. Because we're friends, boy!" "It's not a psychiatric ward."

"Was?"

"It's a psychiatric hospital. It is for short-term patients. A psychiatric department is longer."

"Well, obviously you've been there long enough to be an expert.

How long are you staying?" "Until I set a baseline."

"What does that mean? Wait, I still don't understand: What was wrong with you anyway?"

"I told you I was depressed. I take pills for it as your girlfriend."

"Like my girlfriend?"

"Dariez, shut up!" Emmah screams in the background.

"My girlfriend doesn't take pills," Kristopher says.

Richard screams, "The only thing she takes is-" The rest is interrupted by laughter and I hear him being beaten by something.

"Maybe you should talk to her a bit more and find out what she's like," I say. "You could learn something."

"You tell me how to treat Emmah now?" asks Kristopher. I hear him licking his lips. "What if I didn't know what this was really about?"

"What, Kristopher. What is it really about?"

"You want my girl, buddy. You've wanted them for about two years. You're angry that you didn't get them, and now you've decided to turn into depression, and now you're gone somewhere, probably you'll be turned into someone's bitch, trying to play the pity card to make them end up with you... And I call you as a friend to try to lighten your mood and you hit me with all this crap? Who do you think you are?"

"Yo, Kristopher."

"Was?"

I'm going to do a trick that Richard showed me. He did it a long time ago, and I think Kristopher forgot about it.

"Me."

"Was?"

"Me."

"Was?!"

"She, she, she, she, she-"

I pause. Hold it, hold it...

"Fuck you."

And I close the phone.

It hits my finger and I go to my room, next to Joy, crying.

"What happened?" He asks.

"I have no friends," I say, jumping and holding my finger.

"It's hard to learn."

I look out of the window, through the blinds, into the night. Now I am. I run my finger under cold water in our bathroom. I didn't think I could be more than last night, but here I am. I'm in a hospital. I have sunk to the deepest place where I can be. I'm in a place where I'm not allowed to shave myself — even if I had to shave biologically — because they're afraid I'm using the razors on myself. And everyone knows it. I am in a place where children have no teeth and eat liquid food. And everyone knows it. I'm in a place where the boy I'm eating with lives in his car. And everyone knows it.

I can't function here anymore. I mean in life: I can't function in this life. I don't feel any better than I did last night in bed, with one difference: when I was lying in my bed - or in my mother - I could do something about it; Now that I'm here, there's nothing I can do. I can't ride my bike to Kinzua Bridge. I cannot take a whole bunch of pills and sleep well one night; the only thing I can do is crush my head on the toilet seat, and I still don't even know if that would work. They take away your options and all you can do is live, and it's just like Humble said: I'm not afraid to die; I'm afraid to live. I was scared before, but I'm afraid of even more now that I'm a public joke. The teachers will hear from the students. You'll think I'm trying to find an excuse for bad work.

I get into bed and put the single top sheet over me. "That - fucking shit."

"You're depressed?" Joy says.

"And."

"I also suffer from depression."

I feel cycling starting again - I'll get out of here at some point and have to go back to my real life. This place is not real. This is a facsimile of life, for broken children. I can handle the facsimile, but I can't handle the real thing. I'm going to have to go back to Executive Pre-Professional and deal with teachers and Kristopher and Emmah, because what the hell do I know? I put everything on this stupid test. What else am I good at?

Nothing - I'm good at nothing.

I get up and go to the nurses' station.

"I won't be able to sleep."

"You can't sleep?" The nurse is a white-haired little old lady with glasses.

"No, I know I can't sleep," I reply. "I take preventive measures."

"We have a sedative called Atavan. It is injectable. It will relax you and let you sleep."

"Let's do it," I say, and with Paullie's supervision, I sit down at the phones and have a small needle attached to what looks like a butterfly clip in my arm. I stare forward as something yellow is pumped into me, and then I stumble into my room-stumbling because I feel it hitting me, even as I get up from the chair. It's kind of a powerful muscle relaxant, and loving hands pull me down when I fall into bed after time, but the last thought I have before I go to sleep is:

Great, soldier, now you're depressed and in the hospital and addicted to drugs. And everyone knows it.

Nurse Monieec takes me to the same office where I was interviewed the day before to ask me how I adapt. I look at the white walls and the table where she showed me the pain chart and think I've come quite far since yesterday. I ate and slept; There is no denying that. Eating and sleeping is good for a body. But I needed the shot.

"How do we feel today?" Ask her.

"Good. Well, I couldn't sleep last night. I had to take a shot."

"I saw on your map. Why do you think you couldn't sleep?"

"My friends called. They were somehow... to make fun of my whole situation."
"And why would they do that?"

"I don't know."

"Maybe they're not your friends." "Well, I told them... "on you", basically. The most important one, Kristopher. I told him, 'on you.'"

"Did that make you feel good?"

I sigh. "Yes. There was also a girl."

"Who would that be?"

"Emmah. One of my friends."

"And her?"

"I'm done with her too."

"So you made a lot of big decisions on your first day here."

"And."

"This is what happens to boys' children: they come and make big decisions. Sometimes it's good decisions, sometimes it's bad ones."

"Well, I hope so, of course."

"Me too. What do you think about the decisions?"

I imagine Emmah and Kristopher breaking up, replaced by Joy and also this girl.

"It was the right thing to do."

"Wonderful. Now you've made some new friends here too, isn't that true?"

"Sure."

"I noticed that you spoke to Humboldt Koper in front of the smoking lounge last night."

"Is that his real name?" I laugh. "Yes, well, right, you talked too. That was all of us."

"Yes. Now you may not want to be so friendly to your fellow patients on the floor. "

"Why not?"

"This can distract children from the healing process."

"How?"

"This is a hospital. It's not a place to make friends. Friends are wonderful, but this place is about you and making you feel better."

"But..." I fidget. "I respect Humble. I respect Joy. I have more respect for them after a day and a half than for most children ... in the world, really." "Just be careful to build close relationships, Dariez.

Focus on yourself."

"Okay."

"Only then will healing take place?"

"All right."

Nurse Monieec leans back with her moon face.

"As you know, we have certain activities on the ground."

"Right."

"On your first day you are exempt from activities, but after that, you are expected to participate daily."

"Okay."

"That means you start today. This is an opportunity for you to explore your interests. So I ask you: What are your hobbies?" Bad question, Monieec.

"I don't have any."

"Aha. None at all?"

"No."

I work, Monieec and I think about work, and I freak out about work, and I think about how much I think about work, and I freak out about how much I think about work, and I think about how freaked out I get about how much I think about work. Does that count as a hobby?

"I understand." She takes notes. "So-o, we can put you in any activity group." "I guess."

"And you're leaving?"

"Can I play cards with Armelio in the groups?"

"No."

"Will participating in them get me out of here on Thursday?"

"I can't say for sure. But not participating is seen as a step backwards in the healing process."

"Okay. Sign me up."

Nurse Monieec marks a sheet in her lap. "Your first activity tonight, before dinner, will be crafts with Lacey in the activity lounge located through the doors behind the nurse station."

"I thought those doors wouldn't open."

"We can open it, Dariez."

"When does it start?"

"Seven."

"Oh. I won't be there at exactly seven."

"Why?"

"I have to meet someone at seven o'clock."

"A visitor?"

"Sure," I lie.

"A friend?"

"Well, yes. Hitherto. I hope so."

at 18:52

I position myself at the end of the hall where I met my parents again yesterday and today - this time around three, this time without Sarah; She was with a friend.

Dad wasn't kidding and Mom brought the shirt for Joy who shook her hand and told her your girl was great and she told him she knew that. Dad asked if we could watch movies... and I told him we did, but since so ~Sped~ kids were older, they were boring movies with Cary Grant and Greta Garbo and stuff, and he asked if I wouldn't like it if he put Oversaw II on DVD.

And I checked with Howard and it turned out that the hospital had a DVD player like any other in the world, so Dad and I made an appointment for Wednesday night, in three days, if he didn't have to work late. He came by with Blade II and we all watched it.

The place where I sit is the part of the H that reflects the part next to the smoking lounge. Joy said she didn't smoke, so I think she'd like to meet here. I didn't tell my parents about her. I told them that I talked to my friends that it didn't go well, but that they are probably part of the problem anyway and it's good to stay away from them for a while. Mom said she knew my friends smoked weed and they probably had a bad influence anyway. Dad said, now you didn't smoke pot, right, Dariez? And I told him no, no, I didn't, not in front of the SATs, as he told me. And we all laughed.

They asked how I ate and I told them that I ate well, which was true.

They asked how I sleep and I told them that I slept well, which I hoped it would be true tonight.

Now I sit cross-legged, only I think it looks weird, so I uncross them, only now I'm cold and nervous, so I cross them again. Punctually at 7:00 p.m., Joy comes down the hallway in the same dresses I saw her yesterday - dark Capri pants and a white woman beater.

She sits on the chair next to me and moves her hair away from her face with little fingers without nail polish.

"You have come," she says.

"Well, yes, you gave me a note. It's like the first time a girl hands me a piece of paper." I smile - I try to sit up and look good in my chair.

"We'll do it quickly," she says. "And it's going to be a game." "Five minutes, right?"

"Right, here's the game: it's just questioned. I'll ask you a question, and you ask me a question."

"Okay. Do you need to answer?"

"If you want, you can answer. But no matter what happens, you have to end up with another question." "So, we deal with questions. Like twenty questions. Why do we need to talk like that?"

"It's the best way to get to know a person. And in five minutes we can ask well over twenty questions. If we don't dawdle.

I'm starting. Ready?"

I concentrate. "Yes." "No, answer with a question. Don't tell me you're stupid. Are you stupid?"

"No!" I shake my head. "Uh... Are you ready?"

"There you go. It's our turn. First question: Do you think I look disgusting?"

My goodness, she cuts directly to the hunt. I took it over. I'm a little ashamed of how I do it because I look at it from the bottom up, like it's on the internet. I look at her feet, which end in plain black sneakers, and her little ankles and her pale lower legs and the depression in the capri pants where the pants begin, under her knee and her body up to her little waist and then the sharp bulge of her breasts and then her neck coming through the bump, extended neckline of her woman's bat and her small chin and lips. The incisions on her face line her cheeks and forehead: small parallel slits, three together at each point, with lumps of white skin at the ends where they heal. They don't look like very deep cuts, and they're thin — I feel like if they heal, they'll look good. And it's beautiful. No question. Her eyes are green and knowing.

"No, you look great," I say.

"What's your question?"

"Uh, why did you give me the note?"

"I found you interesting. Why did you do what it said?"

"I..." I can't come up with a wrong answer fast enough. "I'm a straight boy, you know. So if a girl talks to me or whatever, I'm going to do exactly what she says." Wait now: make it a compliment.

"Especially if it's a pretty girl." I smile.

"You're not very good at this game. What's your question?"

"Oh - right. Ah... Are you heterosexual?"

She sighs. "Yes. Don't get too excited. You don't have a boner, do you?"

"No!" I cross my legs. "No. So... How did you get here?"

"Oh, that's a big one. Crossing the border. What do you think?"

"Someone came up to you while you were cutting your face?"

"Ding-ding-ding! After that, actually. I was bleeding all over the sink. How did you get here?"

"I checked myself in. When did you come here?"

"Why did you check yourself in? Twenty-one days ago. Whoops. Reverse them. Pretend I ended up with the question." She rubs her arms.

"I wasn't feeling well. I called the suicide hotline and they told me to come here. Why have you been here so long?"

"They're not sure I'm going to hurt myself again. What medications are you taking?" "Zoloft. What about you?"

"Paxil- where do you live?"

"Around here... Where do you live?"

"Knox - what do your parents do?"

"My mother designs greeting cards and my father works in health insurance. What about you?"

"My mother is a lawyer and my father is dead. Do you want to know how he died?"

"I'm sorry. How? Do I want to know?"

"These are two questions. Yes, you do. He died while fishing. He fell from a boat. Isn't that the stupidest thing you've ever heard?"

"No. Far from it," I say. "You want to know what I think is the stupidest way to die?"

"Was?"

"Autoerotic suffocation. Do you know what that is?"

"When kids put ropes around them as they repel off, right?"

"Right, I read about it in the DSM. Have you ever read the DSM?"

"The Big Book of Mental Disorders?"

"Yes!"

"Of course. Have you ever heard of Undine's curse?"

"Oh my God! I thought I was the only one who knew about it. Where you forget to breathe. Uh... Where did you see the DSM for the first time?"

"On the bookshelf of my shrinking - you?"

"Same. You also call them 'shrunkened'?"

"They are, aren't they?"

"What does that even mean?"

"I think 'head shrinks' because they make children's heads shrink. Do you think I have all the answers?"

I'm stopping. I need a break. I put my hands on my knees and swing forward. This game is hard. "Is your name Joy?"

"Why shouldn't it be?"

"After the whole thing yesterday at lunch, I don't know what to believe. Do you know my name?" "Of course. Dariez Gilner.

You think I'm an idiot?"

"How do you know my last name?"

"I've read your bracelet. You want to read mine?"

"Joy Hinton." Hey..." I'm like, 'So here's one: Did you know what was going to happen at lunch yesterday?'

"With 'Beth'? Of course. He does that with everyone.

What makes me curious is this: Why did you come by?" "I thought, she-uh, he was, you know, a girl. And I was asked-'

"Why did you come here?"

"Wait, I forgot to ask you a question."

"That's okay. You have a point. Why did you come here?"

"Um, I thought I said: because you're a girl. And you asked me. And you look cool?" You have already said that she is beautiful; Now show that you're not superficial and say she's cool.

"To see how you try to answer these questions correctly is hilarious. You're a stupid boy. You know you're stupid, right?"

Joy leans back and stretches. Her hair falls out of her face and her cuts scream into the light. The lines of her wifebeater reflect her hair.

"Do you know those cuts on your face aren't that bad?"

"How long have I been here, Dariez?"

"You told me twenty-one days. Is that true?"

"Yes. Can you imagine what they looked like when I walked in?"

"Will they get scars?"

"I need surgery to clear them up. Do you think I should?"

"No. Why hide what you went through?"

"I don't know if that's a question. It's too obvious. Wouldn't I be happier without scars?" "I don't know. It's hard to say what would make you happy. I thought I would be happier in a really tough high school, and I ended up here. Wait, where do you go to school?"

"Dolphin." This is a private school in Knox; I think it's the last time they have to wear uniforms. "You?"

"Executive Pre-Professional. Do you have to wear uniforms?"

"Are you like a pervert in school uniform?"

"No. Well... No."

"Two points. You didn't ask a question. Do you like this game?"

"I like talking to you. It's like a math problem. Do you like talking to me?"

"It's all right. Do you like math?"

"I thought I was good at it, but it turns out I'm a year behind everyone else. You?"

"I'm bad at school. I spend most of my time in ballet. But I'm not big enough for that. Have you ever not been big enough for anything?"

"Maybe a few rides when I was a little kid. Why?"

"I'm still too short for these trips. It's to be short.

Remember." It stops.

"A point for you."

"That's three for you. The game is over."

"Okay, cool." I lean back in my seat. "Phew. What now?"

"That's a good question. No idea. I have to go to crafts."

"Me too."

"You want to go together?"

"Sure." I'm stopping. That's a come-on, isn't it? "Can we... uh... Can I kiss you or whatever?"

Joy leans back and laughs and laughs. "No, you can't kiss me!

What do you think we'll play the game once and you can kiss me?" "Well, I thought we had something going on."

"Dariez." She leans in and looks me straight in the eye. "No," she smiles. The cuts wrinkle.

"Do you know when you're leaving?" I ask.

"Thursday."

My heart jumps. "Me too." I start leaning forward: "No. No, Dariez. Arts and crafts."

"Okay." I get up. I reach out to Joy. She ignores it.

"Race you!" she says, sprinting down the hallway to the Activity Lounge as I follow her, trying to keep up – how can I not when my legs are so much longer? Does ballet teach you to walk? Howard yells at us as we pass the nurses' station: "Children! Children!

No running on the floor!" -but I don't care.

"So, who here likes to draw-aw-w?" Lacey asks. Lacey is a tall, smiling lady with lots of makeup and bracelets. She rules the activity lounge, which is just like the art space I had when I was in kindergarten. There are patient-contributed paintings of hamburgers and dogs...

... And dragons on the walls and then there are posters -- OBSTACLES ARE THOSE SCARY THINGS THAT POP UP WHEN WE DISTRACT OUR MINDS FROM OUR GOALS; DREAMS ARE JUST DREAMS UNTIL YOU WAKE UP AND MAKE THEM COME TRUE; THINGS I NEED TO DO TODAY: 1) EXHALE 2) EXHALE.

Fortunately, the alphabet is nowhere to be seen; If I saw Aa Bb, I would probably start cycling again. There is an interesting poster: CHILDREN WITH MENTAL ILLNESS CONTRIBUTE TO OUR WORLD. It lists Abraham Lincoln, Ernest Hemingway, Winston Churchill, Isaac Newton, Sylvia Plath, and a bunch of other smart kids who were kind of crazy.

However, it is depressing. I mean, this space is what I expect from a psychiatric hospital. adults are reduced to children sitting with finger paints; A cheerful boss who tells them that everything they do is great. But isn't that what I asked for when I filled out my menus?

Part: 13

You wanted preschool, soldier, you're in preschool.

I wanted the comfort of preschool, not the ambiance.

You have to take the good with the bad. Like your little chick here. I bet you didn't think you'd come here and find such a fine filly.

Well, she's not a filly.

I have the feeling that filly means girlfriend. I look at Joy.

We try to decide where to sit. I only spoke to her once.

She likes you, boy, and if you can't say that, you won't be able to tell a rifle from a cap gun in this war.

Which war is that again?

The one you fight against with your head. Right, how are we?

You make profits, soldier, don't you see that? Joy and I sit with Humble and the professor. "I see you two met," Humble says.

"Leave them alone," says the professor.

"Where have you been?" Humbly continues. "Were you in a tree kissing?"

"No."

"Nothing happens," says Joy.

"We just sit together," I say. "Dariez and Noelle, sitting in a tree-" He stands up and puts his hands on his hips.

"Wait a minute, what's going on here?" Lacey comes over. "Is there a problem, Mr. Koper?"

"No- what? What are you talking about?" He holds up his hands and sits down. "You mean me?"

Lacey scoffs and announces: "This is free art recreational therapy, for all latecomers!" Humbly points at me and Joy and is a little ashamed of your gesture. "That means you can draw whatever you feel like drawing. It's a great opportunity to explore your creativity and find out what you like to do in your free time! Free time is very important!"

Lacey comes after me when she's done making the announcement:

"You're new. Hi, my name is Lacey. I'm the director of leisure."

"Dariez," I shake her hand.

"You want pencil and paper, Dariez?"

"No. I have nothing to do. I can't draw." "Sure, you can. It does not have to be representative. You can do the abstract. Do you want crayons?"

"No." God, it's so embarrassing. To be asked if you want crayons.

"How about colors?"

"I told you I can't draw."

"Colors are for painting, not drawing."

"Well, I can't do that either."

"What about markers?"

"No."

"All of them?" Lacey turns to the room. "Our new guest, Dariez, has what we call an artistic block. He has nothing to draw!"

"Too bad, buddy!" Armelio shouts from his table. "You want to play cards?"

"Armelio, there are no cards in here. Now, can anyone give Dariez something to draw?"

"Fish!" Joy screams. "Fish are easy."

"Pills," says Joy.

"Joy," admonishes Lacey. "We don't take pills." "Salad," says Ebony.

"She wants you to draw it, but she certainly can't eat it," Humble chuckles.

"Mr. Koper! That's it. Please leave the room." "Oh-h," they all say.

"That's right!" Ebony is calling. She makes the referee gesture. "You're out of here!" "Good," Humble stands up. "Whatever. Blame me. The blame lies with the boy who has total respect for everyone else." He collects his things, which is nothing, and steps out of the activity lounge. "You're all a bunch of yuppies!"

I watch him go.

"You can draw a cat!" says the boy, who is afraid of gravity. "I used to have one. It died."

"Roller," says the bearded boy. These are the first words I hear him say since I saw him in the dining room on the way in. He's still rocking, and he's still walking through the halls when he's not brought into a room.

"What was that, Robert?" Lacey asks. "That's very good."

What did you say?"

But he applauds. He will not say it again. Rolling pin. I wonder what that means for him. If I had anything to say, I don't think it would be a rolling pin. It would probably be sex.

Or postpone...

"He can draw something from his childhood," says Joy next to me.

"Oh, there's a good one. Joy, do you want to speak?"

She sighs and then announces into the room: "Dariez can draw something from his childhood."

"That's right," nods Lacey. "Dariez, do you like any of these suggestions?"

But I'm already gone. I started the river at the top of the page and look down to meet a second river. No, wait, you have to build the roads first, because the bridges go over the water, remember? First highways, then rivers, roads. It all comes back to me. How long has it been since I did this? Since I was nine? How could I forget? I cut one highway across the middle of the side and let it meet another at a beautiful spaghetti highway intersection. A ramp goes from the intersection through a park and ends in a circle, a beautiful hustle and bustle of residential activities. The blocks start from there. The card is forming.

My city...

"Oh, someone unlocked Dariez's mind!" Lacey announces from the other end of the room. I look back. Ebony, who was sitting over there, goes through the arduous process of getting up with her stick and walks towards me. "I want to see."

"Huh, thanks Ebony," I say and turn back to the map. She looks over my shoulder. "Oo-oh, that's pretty," she says.

"What's that?" Armelio screams.

"Let's not shout around the room," says Lacey.

"This is extraordinary," says the professor next to me.

"I deserve half the recognition," says Joy, sketching a flower to my right. She looks at me through the sides of her eyes. "You know I do."

"You do," I tell her, pausing to look at her. I go back to the map. It flows out of me. "Is that someone's brain?" Ebony asks.

I look up at her, roll her mouth and smile down. I look at the map. It's not a brain, of course; It's a map; Can't she see the rivers and highways and intersections? But I see how it might look like a brain, like all the streets are twisted neurons pulling your emotions from one place to another, bringing the city to life. A functioning brain is probably like a map where anyone can get from one place to another on the highways. It is the non-working brains that are blocked, that have dead ends, that are under construction like mine.

"Yes," I say and nod to her. "Yes. That's exactly what it is. It's a brain." And I hold my card in the middle - that's always been a problem for me to finish the damn things; I always ran out of energy before I came to the edge of the page and drew around it. I put a nose and two paired depressions for lips and a neck that ran down. I draw the head so that exactly where the brain would be, this blob is city map. I make a roundabout in the eye and take down boulevards to lead to the estuary, and Ebony giggles above me and taps her cane.

"It's so pretty!"

"It's all right," I say, looking down. I decide it's done. I can do better. I put my initials in the lower CG like "computer generated" - and put the image aside. I ask for more paper and start with the next one.

It's simple - It's simple and pretty and I can do it. I can do these things forever. For the rest of the arts and crafts, I make five.

I get so focused that I don't even notice when

The joy disappears. I only find her note sitting next to me, decorated with a flower as I get my things out of the room.

I'M TAKING A BREAK FROM YOU. CAN'T ATTACH TOO MUCH. THE NEXT MEETING WILL TAKE PLACE ON TUESDAY AT THE SAME TIMES AND PLACES. DON'T WORRY THAT IT'S SUCH A LONG WAIT. I THINK YOU'RE LOVELY.

I fold the note and put it next to the others in my pocket. After the crafts is dinner, where Humble tells me that he forgives me for getting him into trouble, and I thank him, and after dinner are cards with Armelio telling me that now that I've gained a little experience, I might be ready for the big card tournament they have tomorrow night.

"Are you playing with real money?" I ask.

"Nope, buddy! We play with buttons!"

I hang out outside the lounge during the cigarette break - I just follow the group; Wherever they go, I go and talk to Joy about my day. Then I go to my room with my card/brain art. My bed wasn't made during the day, they don't spoil you in Six North - but the pillow has returned to its normal shape, no longer dented by my sweaty head, and when I lie down, it lets the air out in the slowest, soothing hiss I've ever heard.

"You feel better?" Joy asks.

"Quite a lot," I say. "You need to get out of the room more, Joy. There's a whole world out there." "I pray every day that one day I will be better than you."

"I'm not much better, boy."

But I'm good enough to sleep. No shot necessary.

The next day is Monday and I should be at school.

I wasn't supposed to eat with Humble and hear what his girlfriend did to him every day — they passed by a Burger King. I should be in school. I shouldn't explain to Ebony's friend on the phone that what I was drawing was a map of her brain and her echo was, "He's so good, Marlene, she's so good." I should be in school.

I shouldn't put my Zolof behind Joy, who is dressed in my shirt for his interview. I should be in school.

I pluck up the courage to answer the phone at 11 a.m.

and check the messages. "Hey, Dariez, it's Kristopher, listen, I'm sorry, boy.

The truth is, I probably got into a big fight with Emmah after you told me she takes pills and... I think I might have some of this depression stuff as well. Lately I've sometimes been unable to get out of bed, and I'm just... Yah' know, really sleepy and I lose my train of thought. So, I probably called you like that the other day because I projected, that's what Emmah says, and I'm seriously interested in visiting you. Me and Emmah have problems."

I call him back and leave him a message. I tell him if he feels depressed, he should first go to his GP and get a referral to psychopharmacology and go through the process like I did. I tell him it's nothing to be ashamed of. I tell him I'm glad he called, but I don't know if he should visit because I sort my stuff here and I think I want to keep here and the outside world as separate as possible. And I ask him what is going on between him and Emmah, whether they have reconciled yet.

"Hi, Dariez, this is Mr. Reynolds again-"

I call him back and leave a message that I am in the hospital for personal reasons and that he will have his labs if I am good and willing to do them. I tell him that I will present all the records of doctors - including psychiatric pharmacologists, psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses, recreational directors and President Armelio - that I am currently being cared for in a facility where the stress of laboratories is not allowed. And I tell him if he wants to talk to me again, he can call the number here and don't be alarmed if someone replies, "Jack's Pub."

"Hey, Dariez, this is Jenna, I'm one of Emmah's friends, and how... Okay, that's embarrassing, but do you want to have time soon? I've heard about all these things you've been through, like you're in the hospital or whatever, and my last boyfriend was insensitive to this stuff because I'm kind of going through this stuff too? And so I thought you would probably understand me, and I always thought you were cute - we met a couple... but I always thought you were so shy that it wouldn't be fun to hang out with you; I didn't know you were depressed."

-And-

"I think that's brave of you to admit it, and I just think we should hang out."

Well. I call Jenna back and leave her a message that I might be able to hang out with her next week.

That's it - the other messages are from Richard and Scruggs and they're about grass and I'm ignoring them. I put the phone away without hitting it on my finger.

The joy is right in front of me.

"I follow your advice. Come out of the room.'

"Hey, good morning! How are you?"

He shrugs. "Okay. What is to be done?"

"There is a lot to do. Do you like drawing?"

'Eh.'

"Do you like to play cards?"

'Eh.'

"Do you like... Listen to music?"

"Yes." "Great! Okay-'

"Only Italian music."

"Hm." I try to imagine where I can get Italian music, or even what it's called, when Solomon suddenly flies by in his sandals.

"Excuse me if you like, I'll try to rest!" he yells at us. Joy glances at him and curls his face into a laugh, his glasses sticking over his nose.

"What's the problem?" Solomon asks.

"Seventeen days!" Joy says. "The Jew will not talk to me for seventeen days! And now he's doing it. I'm honored."

"I didn't talk to you, I talked to him," Solomon points to me.

"Did you guys meet?" I ask.

Joy and Solomon shake hands - Solomon's pants fall a little, but he bends his legs to hold them up. Then he takes his hand back and stalks away. Joy turns to me: "I think that's enough for one day." And he goes back to our room.

I shake my head.

The phone rings next to me. I call for Armelio. He grabs the phone, says "Jack's Pub" and hands me the phone.

"Me?"

"Yes, buddy."

I take the phone. "I'm looking for Dariez Gilner," says an authoritarian voice through the line.

"Ah, speak. Who is this?"

"This is Mr. Alfred Janowitz, Dariez. I am your principal at Executive Pre-Professional High?"

"Holy crap!" I say and hang up.

The phone starts ringing again. I stand by it and ignore it and explain to Armelio and everyone else who passes by that it's for me, but that I can't answer. They understand perfectly. It is the principle. I was right. I've seen this boy before; He is the one who greeted us on that first day when I was high with Kristopher and told us that only the best was accepted and only the best would be rewarded. He's the one who stops by class and looks at us at tests and hands out chocolates as if that makes up for it. He's the one who

says, "Your school day shouldn't end before five o'clock" and is always in the newspapers as the straightest headmaster and now he's on mine because he knows I'm crazy and knows I haven't done my homework. I should never have left this message to Mr. Reynolds. That's it. I am expelled. I'm out of school. I will never go to high school again. I will never go to college.

When the phone finally dies, I start running.

I was right the whole time. What was I thinking? You add up your little victories here and think they count for something. You get lulled into thinking that Six North is the real world. You make friends and have a concise little conversation with a girl, and you think you've made it, Dariez? They didn't make it in the slightest. You didn't win anything. They have proved nothing. You haven't gotten better. You didn't get a job. They don't make money. You're in here, costing the state money, taking the same pills you took before. You're wasting your parents' money and taxpayers' money. You have nothing wrong with yourself.

That was all an excuse, I think. I was fine. I had an average of 93 and kept my head above water. I had good friends and a loving family. And because I had to be the center of attention, because I needed something more, I ended up here, wallowing in myself and trying to convince everyone around me that I was a kind of ... Illness.

I don't have a disease. I keep going. Depression is not a disease. It's an excuse to be a prima donna. Everyone knows that. My friends know it; My principal knows. The sweating has started again. I feel cycling roaring in my brain. I didn't do anything right. What did I do, take some small pictures? That counts for nothing. I'm done. My principal just called me and I hung up and didn't call back.

I'm done. I am expelled. I'm done.

The boy is back in my stomach and I rush to my bathroom, but something about me won't let it go. I lean over the toilet and moan and hack, but it won't come, so I wash my mouth out and go to bed.

"What happened?" Joy asks. "You never sleep during the day."

"I'm in big trouble," I say, and I lie there just getting up to eat lunch until Dr. Ross comes by at three o'clock and sticks her head into my room.

"Dariez? I'm here to talk."

"I'm very happy to see you." We are back in the room where Sister Monieec checks me out. Dr. Ross seems very familiar with this.

"I'm glad to see you too. I'm glad to see you well," she says.

"Yes, it was a rollercoaster ride, I have to say."

"An emotional rollercoaster."

"And."

"Where is this roller coaster right now, Dariez?"

"Down. Way down."

"What pulled you down?"

"I got a call from my principal."

"And what did he want?"

"I don't know. I hung up."

"What do you think he wanted, Dariez?"

"To drive me away."

"And why would he want to do that?"

"Hello? Because I'm here? Because I'm not in school?" "Dariez, your principal can't expel you because you're in a psychiatric hospital."

"Well, you know all my other problems."

"What are they?"

"Hanging out with my friends all the time, getting depressed, not doing homework..."

"Uh-huh. Let's hold this back for a moment, Dariez. I haven't seen you since Friday. Can you tell us a little bit about how you got here?"

I give her the rap. There's a lot more to add now than being on Six North. About joy and eating and not vomiting and sleeping, where I am one for two.

"How does it compare to Friday, Dariez?"

"Better. Much, much better. But the question is, am I better, or am I just lulled into a false sense of security by this false environment? I mean, that's not normal here."

"Nowhere is normal, Dariez."

"I don't think so. What's new since I've been here?"

"Someone tried to gas the Four Seasons in Knox." "Jeez!"

"I know," grins Dr. Ross. Then she leans into it. "Dariez, there's one thing you didn't mention that your recreational director did. She said you made art while you were here."

"Oh yes, that's nothing. Only yesterday."

"How is it?"

"Well, do you remember the last time I told you the joy - that I liked to draw cards when I was a little kid? It kind of came out of that."

"How so?"

"When they gave me a pencil and paper in arts and crafts, I remembered -- well, I didn't remember, I was told to do it by Joy -"

"That's the girl you met?"

"Right."

"From the way you describe it, I can see that a real friendship is developing."

"Oh, forget a friendship. We'll go out when I leave, I think."

"You think you're ready for this, Dariez?"

"Absolutely."

"All right." She takes a note. "So, how did Joy help you?"

"She suggested I draw something from my childhood, and that made me think of the cards."

"I understand."

"And I started drawing one, but then Ebony came by-"

"You're with all these kids on a first name basis."

"Of course."

"Have you ever considered yourself good at making friends,
Dariez?"

"Don't do it!"

"But you can make friends here."

"Right... Well, here is different."

"How is it different?"

"It is, I don't know... There is no pressure."

"No pressure to make friends?"

"No, no pressure to work hard."

"As it is in the outside world."

"Right."

"Enormous pressure out there. Your tentacles."

"And."

"Are there tentacles in here, Dariez?"

I stop and think. The way they do things on Six North has become clear to me: it's about keeping kids busy and enjoying time. You wake up and immediately have a blood pressure monitor around your arm and someone to measure your pulse. Then it's breakfast. Then you get your medication and then there's a smoking break, and then you might have fifteen minutes to yourself before there's any kind of activity. That leads to lunch, which leads to more medication and more smoking and more activities, and then suddenly the day is over; It's time — for dinner, and everyone swaps salt and desserts, and then it's the 10 p.m. cigarette break and bedtime.

"No, there are no tentacles in here," I say. "The opposite of a tentacle is a simple task, something that is placed in front of you and that you do without question.

That's what they have in here."

"Right. Your only tentacles in here are your calls, which just knocked you down."

"Right."

Dr. Ross takes notes. "Well, here's an important question,

Dariez. Are there any anchors here?"

"Hm."

"Anything you can hold on to."

I'm thinking about it. If one anchor is a constant, there are many of them. There's the constant light FM that occasionally borders on dangerously funky and comes out of the nurse's station, whether Paullie or Howard is behind it. There is the constant schedule: the food comes and goes, the medicines that are distributed, the announcements of Armelio. There is the constant of Armelio himself, always ready to play cards. And My-a Joy is always there and says, 'It will come to you!'

"The children are anchors," I say.

"But children don't make good anchors, Dariez. They change. The children here will change. The patients will leave. You can't rely on them."

"When will they leave?"

"I can't know."

"What about the staff?"

"They also change, just on a different Joy scale. Children come and go."

"Joy. She's beautiful and smart and I like her. It could be an anchor."

"You don't want one of your anchors to be members of the opposite sex you're attracted to," says Dr. Ross. "Relationships change even more than children. It's like two children changing clothes. It is exponentially more volatile. Especially two teenagers."

"But Romeo and Juliet were teenagers," I point out.

"And what happened to Romeo and Juliet?"

"Oh," I murmur. "Right."

"And did we go beyond that, Dariez? Have we gone beyond thinking these thoughts?" "Yes," I nod.

"Because when you have those thoughts again, you know you have to come back here."

"I know. I won't."

"Why not?"

"It's just... It would be to kill me. I would hurt many children and

... It would be."

"That's right," Dr. Ross leans across the table. "It would be. And not just for other children. For you." "It's not noble or anything," I say. "Like this boy Joy, who is my roommate, he's practically dead. He does nothing. He's just lying in bed all day."

"Right."

"And I never want to be like him. I don't want to live like that. And if I were dead, I would live like this."

"Excellent, Dariez."

It stops. As I said, the good shrinkers know when to take a dramatic break.

I tap with my feet. The fluorescent tubes hum.

"I want to pick up your anchors again," says Dr. Ross. "Can you think of anything else you've found here that might take up your time - if you leave?" I think. I know there's something. It's at the tip of my brain tongue. But it won't happen.

"No."

"Okay, no problem. You have made great progress today."

There's only one thing we need to do: call your principal."

"No!" I tell her, but she pulls out her phone, which is allowed up here. "Yes, I would like to have the number for Executive Pre-Professional High School in Knox."

"You can't, you can't," I say, leaning across the table and reaching for the phone. Fortunately, the blinds are closed so that no one can see in here; If they did, they would probably let me sedate. She gets up and goes to the door, pointing outside. Do I want security here? I sit down again.

"Yes," she says. "I need to talk to the principal. I am returning a call from him to one of your students regarding a health and legal matter. I am the mother." A break.

"Great." She touches the phone. "I am connected." "I can't believe you're doing this," I say.

"I can't believe you're worried that I'm doing this... Yes, hello? Is that Lord...", she looks at me.

"Janowitz," I say.

"Janowitz?"

I hear an affirmative mumph through the line. "I'm Dr. Ross and I'm calling for your student, Dariez Gilner. They had previously called him at the psychiatric facility at UMPC Hospital in Knox. I'm Dariez's licensed therapist and I'm right here with him; Would you like to talk to him?"

She nods. "Let's go, Dariez."

I take the phone - it's smaller than mine, grumpier. "Um, hello?"

"Dariez, why did you hang me up?" His booming voice is light and gentle, almost laughing.

"Ah... I thought I was in trouble. I thought I was being expelled. You called me, you know, in the hospital."

"Dariez, I called you because I got a message from one of our teachers. I just wanted to tell you that you have the full support of the school in everything you're going through, and that we're more than willing to repeat your semester or give it over the summer, or that work will be provided for you where you are now if you miss enough days to justify it. "

"Oh."

"We don't judge our students because they're in the hospital, my goodness, Dariez."

"No? But it's like a psychiatry-"

"I know what kind of hospital it is. Do you think we don't have any other children in these situations? It is a very common problem in young children. "

"Oh. Uh, thank you."

"Are you okay?"

"I feel better."

"Do you know when you're leaving?"

I don't want to tell him on Thursday and then have it on Friday.

Or next Thursday. Or next year.

"Soon," I say.

"Okay. You just keep at it, and whenever you come back, we're waiting for you at Executive Pre-Professional." "Thank you, Mr. Janowitz." And I imagine it in my head:

I'm going back to school. My small group of friends - only they are not even my friends anymore, offered by this new collection of girls who like me because I'm depressed and teachers who are compassionate and the suddenly nice principal. That's something I want to look forward to. But I can't.

"You see, was that so bad?" asks Dr. Ross. And I have to admit that it wasn't. But it was like being told that the prison is glad you were granted a pardon, but we will be here with open arms to welcome you when you come back.

"The plan now is to fire you on Thursday, Dariez, and I'll be here to talk to you on Wednesday, all right?" asks Dr. Ross. I shake her hand and thank her. I tell her what I tell her when I feel really good, when I talk to her, which is that she knows how to do her job. Then I go back to my room and draw some brain maps.

I'm looking forward to tonight, Armelio's big card tournament.

"Okay!" says Armelio. "Everyone here?"

We are back in the activity lounge. Joy, Humility, Ebony and the Professor are here. Everyone shaved today - it turns out that the shaving rule is enforced only on weekdays - and they look ten times better. Even Rolling Pin Robert, who walks through the halls outside, looks usable. I have to remember: shaving can even make a psychiatric patient look good.

"Hm." Joy exhales. "Joy is still in his interview." "Yes," says Ebony. "Dariez lent him a shirt. You're so nice, Dariez."

"Thank you."

"When will you make more of your art?"

"Maybe tonight, for cards."

"That's right, buddies, cards are what we need to focus on," Armelio announces. It stands at the head of the table, which is covered with paint drops, colored pencil stains and ink stains over uneven wood. In the middle there is a plastic container with the buttons, which are divided into four uniform partitions. It looks like at some point the buttons were sorted by size or color, but now they're all mixed in every imaginable hue, shape, and embellishment.

They look like jewels.

"I don't want one of my buttons to be missing at the end!" Says Lacey from behind. She sits at the other table, reads a Roboyce novel and supervises.

"That's right, we're still looking for the Blue Button Bandit," Humble says. "Anyone who can suddenly hold up their pants will be very suspicious. Pay attention to Solomon, that is. And ebony."

"I told you once, stupid, to stop talking about my pants." "Okay, everyone ready?" Armelio asks. "Take your buttons!"

Our hands dip into the middle of the table and reach for a handful. We pour the buttons in front of us and distribute them with our fingertips into a layer one button thick. Armelio can judge whether we have an equal amount.

"Humbly put six buttons back. Ebony, put back ten. Joy, what's wrong, buddy? You also have two hundred buttons ~Sped~!"

"I have a button bonus," says Joy, and just then Joy comes into the activity room.

He moves with his normal slanted gait and leans back with my shirt. He stops at the end of our table, makes sure he has our attention, raises his right hand, shakes it in the air as if he were doing a magic trick, and then hits the table with both fists so that his arms form a "V-shape" as if he were chairman of the board. He grins:

"I got it."

Silence holds the room.

Lacey begins clapping from behind, slowly, but with awe and determination. Then Armelio turns on and the pace begins to turn.

"All right!"

"Congratulations!"

"Hurray for Knox scumbags!"

"Joy-by! Joy-by!"

In a small room, the clapping of eight children can be a lot. The posters seem to tremble with applause. When it gets louder, there is howling and howling and cheering. Tommy stands up and hugs Joy a bear as seen between two men who have known each other for twenty years, who were Fiend One and Fiend Two, for whom one victory counts as much for the other.

"Joy, buddy, you boy!" Armelio walks over to the hugging couple and hits Joy on the back, almost falling over me.

"Wait a minute," says Joy. He breaks away from the embrace and holds up his right hand. "Before we get too crazy because I see the buttons are out, I have to thank this little boy over here." He approaches me. "This boy gave me the shirt off his back, this blue one, and he didn't know me from Adam, and there's no question, without him I wouldn't have gotten this house. This new home."

I stand up and Joy hugs me, his big bony hands wrap around my back, and I feel the smooth old skin of his cheek and the well-knitted fabric of my shirt doing a better job on him than ever. I think about how much that means to this boy; about how much more important it is than going to high school or being with a girl or being friends with someone. This boy has just been given a place to live. I? I have one. I will always have one. I have no reason to worry about that. My stupid fantasies of becoming homeless are just that – the fact is that my parents will take me in time, everywhere. But some children have to be lucky just to live. And I never knew I could make anyone happy.

If Joy gets a place to live, I think then I can get a life worth living.

"Thank you, child," says Joy.

"It's nothing," I murmur. "Thanks for the tour." "Alright, guys, we're going to play cards or what?" Armelio asks, but Joy stops him.

"One more thing: I'm sorry, Dariez, but I accidentally fell into something on my way back from the interview." He turns around. There is a... Wait a minute...

There's a huge piece of in the back of my shirt, just above his belt.

"Ah..." I can't believe I didn't smell it. Did I touch it when I hugged him? "Ah, joy... That's okay... My mother can wash it out-"

"It's not real!" Joy reaches back and pulls it off, throws it at me. It bounces off my shirt (a tie-dye T-shirt that everyone likes on Six North) and lands on the table in the buttons.

"It's plastic! I've had it since the eighties! Ha! I love it!"

Armelio collapses. "Holy crap! Look at that! It looks like something my mom would leave in my bedroom!" Everyone stops, turns around.

"President Armelio, we didn't need to know that," Humble says.

"Your mother would defecate in your bedroom?" the professor asks.

"Who said that?" Armelio asks. "I talked about plastic, what's wrong with you?"

"Everyone cools it just a little bit," says Lacey, standing up with her book by her side. "Let's have fun, but stay calm."

"Alright, who gets the doodie button?" Humbly holds it up. "I think it counts for two."

Joy sits down and we sit up. The game is poker, seven-card stud. I'm not good at it. The hands start and the kids start betting crazy and throw in three or four buttons right at the beginning. I can't keep up with them. I have a limited number. And I don't seem to get good hands. So-o I fold. I fold three times in a row.

The third time, Joy says, "You might as well bet. They're just buttons."

"Yes," says Humble. "Let me show you a secret." He reaches into the button container and takes out a handful.

"See?"

"I understand," Armelio says, looking over his cards. "Don't think this isn't a fraud, humble. More and you're out."

I laugh and put six buttons.

"What exactly am I out?" Humbly Armelio asks. "The button jackpot?"

"Be nice," says the professor.

"Oh, listen to her," Humble shrugs. "The attempt to be the mediator." He leans against me. "Don't let her grandma fool you."

She's a real cough."

"Excuse me?" The professor lays down her cards. "What do you mean by 'Grandma'?"

"Nothing, you just have this little old grandma look around you to lull children into your trap of playing good cards!" He gestures humbly to himself in disbelief.

"You say I'm old."

"It's not me! I say you're a grandma!"

"Humble, excuse me," Lacey says from behind.

"Why? Grandmas are wonderful things."

"For your information, I will let you know," says the professor, "that unlike certain children here, I behave at my age."

"Oh, so I'm a liar now?" Ask humbly and stand up.

"We all know you are," says the professor.

"Guys..." Lacey warns.

"If I'm a liar, do you know what you are?"

"What? You'd better not call me old, because I'll take this stick and hit you on the head in front of everyone."

"You don't take anything away from me!" Ebony holds her stick. Quietly it has far away from most buttons.

"You're a yuppie!" Humbly screams, and he picks up the dog doo and throws it at her head. "A stupid yuppie with no respect for anyone!"

"A-agh!" The professor holds her face. "He broke it! He broke my nose!" The dog Doo has jumped across the room and Lacey jumps slightly over it as she hastily retreats.

"Uh-oh," Armelio says. "Now you guys have done it. We had such a good card game."

Harold comes into the room with two big boys in light blue overalls, Lacey behind them. Humbly raises his hands. "What? I didn't!"

"C'mon, Mr. Koper", sagt Harold.

"I can't believe it!" Humble says. "She insulted me! It wasn't even my dog poop! I didn't have the gun!"

He starts pointing at Joy. "He is an accomplice. If I go, he leaves."

"Humble, you have three seconds to get here." "All right, all right." Humbly throws down his cards. "You guys have fun with your buttons." He is escorted out by Harold and the security guards and gets a resounding slap on the butt from the professor. She still has a hand on her face and claims that she is bleeding, but when she removes her hand, there is no kind of mark.

Lacey sits down at her table again.

"You all saw what happened. He attacked me," says the professor.

"Yes, we saw it, Doomba," says Armelio.

"Excuse me?"

"You are the Doomba; We all know it's you." "What is a Doomba?" I ask.

"If you ask, maybe you're a Doomba, too!" Armelio looks crazy. This is the first time - I've seen it.

"Huh", haucht Joy.

"Dariez is not a Doomba," says Joy. "He's on the same level." "Am I not the winner yet?" asks Ebony.

"How can you have such ~Sped~ buttons?" asks Armelio.

"You don't win hands!"

"It's because I don't roll over," Ebony says, leaning forward, and a stream of buttons blaring out of her top.

"Oops!"

They keep coming back - a mountain spilling over the Ante pile. She starts laughing and laughing, showing us her very clean and clean gums as she howls, "O-oh, I've got you! I've got it, all of you!"

"That's it," Armelio says, throwing away his cards. "Every Monday the card tournament is always mixed up! I'm stopping!"

"Are you stepping down as president?" Joy asks him.

"Forget yourself, buddy!"

My tongue hurts from so much biting. It may not have been a rules game, but it had as ~Sped~ emotional ups and downs as poker on TV. I clean up with Joy and Lacey.

Tonight, when I go to bed, I'm too busy wondering what a doomba is and when Ebony put the buttons in her breasts and how that feels at all, and Joy and the fact that I can see her tomorrow to do anything but sleep.

Part: 14

The next day, Humble is not there for breakfast. I sit with Joy and collect my perfectly folded shirt and place it on the back of my chair. I drink the first "Swee-Touch-Nee" tea of the day and ask what they did with Humble.

"Oh, he's happy. They went and probably gave him some serious drugs."

"Like what?"

"You know about drugs? Pills?"

"Sure. I'm a teenager."

"Well, Humble is psychotic and depressed," Joy explains. "So he gets SSRIs, lithium, Xanax-" "Vicodin," says Joy. "Vicodin, Valium... He's like the most medicated boy here."

"So when they took him away, they gave him all that stuff?"

"No, that's what he usually gets. If they take him away, they'll give him shots, I bet. Atavan."

"I did."

"Did you? This will blow you away. Was it fun?"

"It was okay. I don't want to take away all the joy of things like that."

"Hm. That's the right attitude," says Joy. "We got a little distracted by drugs, me and Joy."

"Yes, no kidding," says Joy. He shakes his head, looks up, chews and folds his hands. "Not even the word is distracted. We were removed from the face of this planet. We barricaded ourselves twenty-four hours a day. I missed ~Sped~ concerts."

"I'm sorry-"

"-Santana, Zeppelin, what about the junkie, Nirvana... I could see Rush, Van Halen, Mötley Crüe, all of them. All this back when it cost ten dollars to get in. And I was too much of a garbage head to care."

"What is a garbage head?"

"Someone who does anything, whatever," Joy explains. "You give it to me, I would do it. Just to see what it was like."

Jeez. I admit that it sounds a little sexy. I see the appeal. But maybe that's why I'm here to meet guys who take away the appeal.

"Do you think Humble is staging scenes so he can get drugs?" I now sprinkle cream cheese on a bagel. I started ordering bagels x2 for breakfast; They are far from the best option.

"That's the kind of thing you just can't speculate about," Joy says.

"Oh, here comes your girl."

She rushes in with a tray and sits down in a corner, drinks her juice, dips in her oatmeal. She looks over at me. I wave as easily as I can so that the kids think I might have a cramping twitch. I haven't seen her since Sunday; I don't know what she did yesterday. I don't know how she eats if she doesn't leave her room. The same goes for Joy. Maybe they deliver their food? There is still so much I don't know about this place.

"Huh, she's a cutie," says Joy.

"C'mon, boy, don't say that. She's like thirteen," says Joy.

"And? He's like thirteen."

"I'm fifteen."

"Well, then let him say it," Joy tells me. "Leave the thirteen-year-olds to the thirteen-year-olds."

"I'm fifteen," I interject.

"Dariez, you should probably wait a few years, because sex at thirteen can mess you up."

"I'm fifteen!"

"Huh, I did stuff when I was fifteen," says Joy.

"Yes," says Joy. "With boys."

Pause. If Richard were here, he would say it out loud:

"Pause."

"Hm. This food is." Joy pushes his waffles aside. "Child," he says. "Just do it for me. When you're with her, freak her out a bit."

You know what I mean?"

"Stop it," I look at Joy. "You have a daughter that age."

"I would also bring him together with my daughter. It's probably good for her."

"Wait, how do you guys even know that? I only talked to her once, and it was really short. Nothing happened."

"Yes, but you came with her to the activity center."

"We notice everything."

I shake my head. "What's going on today?" "At eleven the guitar boy arrives. Joy, she's going to play."

"Oh yes?"

"Huh, if the inclination hits."

I get my bagel ready. I know what I'm going to do until the guitar boy comes: I'm going to make brain cards. I kind of have an audience now. Lacey lent me high-quality pencils and glossy paper, as I helped her clean up after the card tournament debacle so I could draw whenever I wanted. When I do, children line up to watch me at work. Ebony is my biggest fan; She seems to like nothing better than sitting behind me and watching the cards fill up in the children's heads; I think she likes them more than I do. The professor is also great in them; She says my art is "extraordinary" and I could sell it on the street if I wanted to. I branch into variations: cards in children's bodies, cards in animals, cards that connect two children. It comes naturally, and the joy of time passes – and it feels a little more successful than playing cards.

"I'm going to work on my art," I tell the boys.

"If I had half of your initiative, things would turn out differently," says Joy.

"Hm, yes; I want to be you when I grow up," Joy says.

I go out with my tablet.

The guitar boy is called Neil; He has a black and a black shirt and suede pants, and he looks stoned. He comes in with a vintage-looking electric guitar — I don't know any brands, but it looks like something the Beatles would have had — and puts it in his amplifier on a chair before we submit it. There's something I didn't expect in the room — instruments on all the seats around the circle and kids running for those who want them. We have visitors today, nursing students learning what it's like to work in a psychiatric hospital, and they've weighed in with us, sat down, and mediated arguments about who gets the bongo drums, the conga drums, the two sticks you beat together, the washboard, and the coveted seat on the electric keyboard.

"Hey, everyone!" Neil wavers. "Welcome to musical exploration!"

He plays simple chords in a studded belt that I think is supposed to be reggae, and after a while I realize it's "I Shot the Sheiff." He starts singing and he just has a

terrible voice, like an albino-Jamaican frog, but we tune in as best we can with our voices and all the instruments we end up with.

Armelio hits his chair with a few sticks and is bored, leaving the room.

Becca, the big girl, asks if she can exchange her bongos (the little ones) for my congas (the big ones), and I change. I try to play the fills that come after the choruses in 'I Shot the Sheiff' and Neil realizes that I'm trying, gives me the chance to shine every time - but I can't pull them off.

Joy, directly opposite me, shakes Maracas and her hair and smiles. I occasionally fire off a bongo filling just for her, but I'm not sure she notices. The star of the show is my-a Joy.

I had no idea that the high-pitched noises he made were singing. As soon as the music starts, he goes straight into the universe, bangs against his washboard and leaves everything hanging in a piercing falsetto that is surprisingly on the key. The thing is, he doesn't sing 'I Shot the Sheiff'. He sings only one sentence:

"How cute it is!"

No matter where the song is or what it is; Joy will hum along to the tune when needed, and then, as soon as there's a pause to hear him over, remind us, "How cute it is!" He sounds a bit like Mr. Hankey from South Park. The nursing students, who are all West Indians like nurse Monieec and young, unlike her, absolutely love him and give him a big smile, which increases his activity. My-a Joy may only have a few sentences in his repertoire, but he knows he has to keep going when pretty girls pay attention to him.

I send out filling for him. He sings back. I am convinced that part of him knows that we have come together. When "I Shot the Sheiff" ends in a crescendo of percussion that seems destined to never end (everyone wants to hit that last note, including me), Neil begins with the Beatles: "I want to Hold Your Hand", "I Feel Fine". The Beatles are the keyword for children to get up and dance. It starts with Becca, to the left of Neil. A nurse pulls her up, she leaves her conga aside and starts wiggling her big butt in the middle of a circle – we scream encouragement. She blushes and grins, and when she sits down, it's Joy's turn — he moves like John Travolta in Pulp Fiction, shaking his hips with a laconic tilt and turning his feet more than his body.

Joy refuses to dance, but Joy is his head. The nursing students dance with each other and with Neil. Then it comes to me. I hate dancing. I've never been good at it, and I don't mean that in the traditional scared teenage way: I'm not good.

But a nursing student has stretched out both hands to me, and Joy is on the other side of the room.

I put my bongos aside and try to think about what I'm doing while I'm doing it. I know you shouldn't think about dancing, what is that stupid expression, singing like no one is listening, dancing like no one is watching? Whatever... I want to dance like Joy, and I know the way to do that is to move my hips, so I focus on that and think a lot. I don't think about my arms. I don't think about my legs. I don't think about my head. I think of shaking my hips back and forth and then in and out and then in circles, and suddenly the nursing student is behind me -- I had my eyes closed and there's another one in front of me making a Dariez Gilner sandwich, and I'm dancing like I'm one of those cool club boys with two chicks. I have two chicks.

I extend my hand to Joy in a fit of confidence. She gets up and we go to the middle of the floor and shake our hips together, never touching each other, never talking, just smiling, keeping our eyes closed. I think she's looking to me for tips, so I speak to her:

"Shake your hips!"

She does, her arms as out of place as my own, hanging on her sides and nowhere sexy. Where should you put your arms when you dance? It's like the universal question. I think you should put them around someone.

When it's Joy's turn to dance, he gets up, throws down his washboard and puts his finger over Neil's lips. Neil stops playing. My-a Joy does a pirouette over the unaccompanied wild percussion we've built up and lands on his knee: "How cute it is!"

When Neil's guitar is packed, he comes by.

"Good job with these drum fillings."

"And?"

"Yes. I've never seen you before. What's your name?"

"Dariez."

"You had a good rhythm; They got children moving. Ah, I hope you don't mind me asking this, but... Why are you here? You seem pretty, you know, well."

"I have depression," I say. "I had it bad. I'll be out in two days."

"Great, wonderful, that's great to hear. I have a lot of friends with it." He nods at me. "Once you're outside, you ever think you might think about it... Volunteering in a place like this?"

"Volunteering with what?"

"Well, do you play instruments?"

"No."

"You probably could. You have a good musical sense."

"Thank you. I make art."

"What kind of art?"

I lead him out of the activity center, past the nurse's station and the phone, to my room, where Joy is lying in bed.

"Dariez, I hear you all in the music room," he says.

"You should have come."

Neil smiles at him: "Hello."

"Hm."

I pull out the stack of my brain cards for Neil. "I'll do it." I give him a whole armful, maybe fifteen of the best of them. The one above is a duo, a boy and a girl with a bridge that connects the cities in their heads.

"They're cool," says Neil. He flips through them.

"Have you been doing this for a long time-?"

"It depends," I say. "Ten years or a few days, depending on how you count it."

"Can I have one?"

"I don't know if I can give them away for free." "Ha! Listen, really, here's my map." Neil pulls out a simple black and white business card that identifies him as a guitar therapist. "Whenever you're not here, and I'm sure it will be soon, call me and we can talk about volunteering, and — I'm serious — I might want to buy some of them. How old are you? You should be on the teen floor, right, but renovate it?" "I'm young," I say.

"I'm glad you came here and got the help you needed," Neil says, and he shakes my hand like kids do here to remind themselves that you're the patient, and they're the

doctor/volunteer/employee. They like you, and they really want you to do better, but when they shake your hand, you feel that distance, that slight separation, because they know you're still broken somewhere, that you could snap at any moment.

Neil leaves the room and I spend the rest of the day drawing and playing cards with Armelio. Around half past one I call mom, tell her about singing along and the card tournament and how I danced, and she confirms that I sound better and that she heard from Dr. Mahmoud that Thursday is a solid day and she and dad will be ready to pick me up when it's Joy. Even though it's only a few blocks back to my house, they have to pick me up personally.

In the late afternoon, while playing spit with Armelio and getting crushed, Paullie comes by and tells me that I have a visitor.

I know it's not mom or dad or Sarah; They come one last time tomorrow - if Dad brings hope to God, it's not Kristopher or any of his friends. Blade II. I- It is Emmah.

I see her through the big window in the dining room and look like she's crying or she's about to cry, or both. She comes down the hallway and I walk away from Armelio without saying a word to go up to her.

Part: 15

"What are you doing here?" I ask and then pause. That's a question other kids should ask me.

"What do you think?" She has a light makeup that makes her lips sparkle and her cheeks are a slight Asian red; Her hair is pulled back to emphasize the curved proportions of her face. "I'm here to see you.

"Why?"

She turns away. "I'm having a really hard time right now, okay Dariez?"

"All right," I step with her. "Come on, the best place to talk is here."

I lead her through the hall with familiarity and confidence that seems to surprise her. I think I'm a veteran here now. A kind of alpha male. What reminds me: still no humble.

"Here." I'm sitting here on the chairs sitting with my parents and Joy: 'What's wrong?'

She puts her hands on her knees. She wears a small beige fighting outfit with black boots; she looks like a Soviet soldier recruit. The light comes in behind her and

makes her skin sparkle. I've seen her in this outfit before; It's one of their hottest: if you tie small breasts in boys' clothes, they're all the more fascinating.

"Kristopher and I broke up," she says.

"No." I open my eyes wide.

"Yes, Dariez." She wipes her face. "After that night when he called here? And you told him I was on Prozac?"

"What? Are you saying it's my fault?"

"I'm not saying anyone is to blame!" She hacks her arms against her thighs and takes a deep breath.

The professor looks out of her room.

"Who are you?" Emmah turns around.

"I'm Aboyda," she says. "I'm Dariez's friend."

"Well, we're trying to have a conversation; I'm sorry." Emmah wipes her hair.

"It's okay. But you shouldn't scream. Solomon will come out."

"Who is Solomon?" Emmah turns to me. "Is he so dangerous?" "No one here is dangerous," I say, and as I say it, I put my hand over Emmah's hand, on her thigh. I'm not sure why I'm doing it – to calm them down? I think it's just an instinct, a reaction. Subconsciously, I assume that I think it's a hot thigh and that I'd like to have my hand there without her hand serving as a buffer. I've never had the chance to touch a girl's thigh, and Emmah's beige seems to be just as seductive as thighs. I even find it a sexy word: thighs.

"Dariez, hello?"

"Sorry, I took a step back."

She looks down at my hand and grins a little. It doesn't move it away. "You're funny. I asked you if you like it here."

"It's not bad. It's better than school."

"I believe that." Now her hand - her other hand - is on my hand on her thigh. I think of the dancing sandwich I used to be in the Activity Lounge. I feel how warm it is and remember how I noticed that eons ago at the party. "I was thinking about going to a place like this."

"What?" I pull my body away, but hold my hand under hers.

"What do you mean?"

"I've been thinking about checking myself in, spending some time — here or somewhere in the way you re-enter, like you."

"Emmah." I shake my head. "You can't just come here because you want to." "Isn't that what you did?"

"Don't do it!"

"What did you do?" She bows her head.

"I... I had a medical emergency," I explain. "I called the suicide hotline and they sent me here."

Emmah leans back. "You called the suicide hotline?" She holds up my hand, clutches it. "Oh, Dariez!" I look at my step. I jump up. I can't help it. She is so close. This face is so close to mine and it is the same face to which I have deviated so ~Sped~ times. I conditioned myself to want that face. I want you. I feel her on me and I want her now in her little Russian army outfit. I want to see what she looks like with it. I want to see what it looks like when it's half sticky.

"I didn't know..." She continues. "I knew you wanted to kill yourself; I never knew you wanted to kill yourself. I would never have told Kristopher that you called me from that strange number when

I knew it was so serious."

"Well, what do you think children come here for?" My hand twitches around hers.

"To get better?" Ask her.

"Yes, exactly. But you have to be bad before they make you better here."

Emmah shakes her head and her hair slides around her dark eyes. "I thought you got sick because of me. And I thought I could make you better."

She's so cute. The way she holds her face, it's as if she always knows the best angles. We cover each other's eyes. I see myself in theirs. I look expectant, ready, eager, stupid, ready to do anything.

I don't like how I look. Humble it would not please either; It has no power or will. But I have no strength or no will when I am with her. I have no choice. We will do what she wants.

"What about Kristopher?" I ask.

"I told you." She almost falls into a whisper. "I broke up with him."

"You broke up with him?" I want it to be clarified.

"It was mutual. Does that matter?"

"Probably separated?"

"Looks like it."

"Don't you think it's a little soon, that you'll come here and touch me?"

She shakes her head and purses her lower lip. "I've been thinking about you since we spoke on the phone on Friday night. And now I know you so much better. You told me all this stuff about yourself and you are really... I don't know... You are mature. You're not like all those other kids with their stupid little problems. You're really messed up." She giggles. "In a good way... The way that makes the experience." "Hm." I don't know what to say. No, wait, I know what to say: Go away, go, I don't need you; I have previously concluded with you on the phone; I met a girl here who is cooler and smarter; But if you have a beautiful girl in front of you and she bites her lip and talks and smiles softly – and you're tough – what are you going to do?

"Hm... uh... well..." I'm stuttering again. Maybe it was Emmah who made me stutter. I sweat too. "Will you show me your room?" Ask her.

This is a bad idea. It's a bad idea, just as it's a bad idea to skip meals or stay awake in bed in the morning or stop taking your Zoloft, but there's no hope for me now. I hand over control to my lower half, which points to my room, and lead Emmah there.

Part: 16

Joy is not in the room. I can't believe it - it's like the first time since I've been here. I look at their crumpled sheets and try to spot a form here, but there's not enough mass to explain them. I look into the bathroom - nothing.

"You have a roommate?" Emmah asks.

"Yes, uh, he's usually here..."

"Ewe-www..." She waves in front of her nose. "Something smells."

"The roommate's Italian; I don't think he's wearing deodorant."

"Me neither."

I pretend to clean up my stuff near my bed, but in reality I'm just taking my brain cards and turning them over.

"You can't get a TV?"

"No."

"Are you reading in here?"

"I like to read aloud with other children in the hall. My sister gave me a star magazine, but the nurses took it away to read for themselves."

She walks up to me and looks up idly and innocently. "Are you getting lonely here?"

"Not really," I tell her. I move hair that sticks to my forehead. I'm sweating now. "It's very social here. I've made friends."

"Who?"

"The lady you talked to outside."

"You? She is so rude. She refined our conversation."

"She thinks someone sprayed insecticide into her apartment, Emmah. She becomes paranoid." "Really? That's crazy. That's crazy."

"I don't know. She might be right." Emmah is now a few meters away from me. Her shoulders are tilted towards me. I could pick them up and throw them on my unmade bed, just like Kristopher has done for the past two years. These words we say are just a façade.

"She's a college professor.

There might be something to it."

"Dariez... "She's right in front of me now. "Do you remember when you called me," she touches my forehead, "oh, you're sweating!"

"Yes, I do. When I get nervous." "Are you okay? You're sweating." "I'm fine." I wipe it away.

"Seriously, Dariez, that's disgusting." She winces and then returns to where she was. "When you called me, do you remember asking what I would do if you came over, grabbed me and kissed me?"

"Yes..." My stomach is tight. The boy is down there pulling on the rope. I thought I had beaten him. I had eaten so well.

"I would let you," she says. "You know I would."

Now she has turned her shiny, sparkling lips up to me, and I feel this amazing dichotomy going on. It's almost like before I came here, when I was in my mother's bed, when my brain wanted to die, but my heart wanted to live. Now literally everything from my stomach up wants to run to the bathroom, vomit, talk to Armelio or Joy or Paullie, kick Emmah out, prepare for my second date with Joy. But the bottom half has been denied for too long. It has been ready for this for two years and knows what it wants. It says that the real cause of all my problems is that I have not satisfied them.

And these are not lips presented to me to correct my lack of play. These are lips that I have had access to in my head for years. I did horrible, horrible things to those lips in the privacy of my bathroom. So- screw it. You have to try it at some point. I lean down, grab Emmah and push her back onto Joy's bed.

I didn't want that; I wanted to turn her over and put her on my bed, but she happened to be in front of me and I couldn't change direction in the middle of the grip. I cover her with my thin body and first kiss her upper lip, envelop her in my lips, then I do the lower one, then she tries to do them both at the same time, only that doesn't work, it's like trying to pull your lips off her head and she laughs, which gives me her beautiful smile to kiss, the hard white teeth - I don't mind - and then I use my tongue like I've seen it in movies and put my hands on her soldier's outfit and feel what I don't have and have wanted for years, pushes myself back, tight and compliant at the same time. Two of them.

"Mm," Emmah says, placing her little hands on the back of my head. She feels my hair; I tremble against them. I can't believe how good it feels. That's how good it feels? Why the hell did I ever get depressed?

I remember what Kristopher said about the inside of a girl's cheek, which feels like another place, and I lick the inside of hers. She trembles; She likes it; It's like Kristopher said: She likes sex; Her tongue becomes a nervous arrow that whizzes in and out of my mouth. I feel the ring - a small metal bubble, something that adds texture, strange and dirty.

Forget it. Let's do it. I reach up to the buttons of her outfit.

My eyes are closed because when I open them, I think I might be a little too excited and ruin my pants, and Mom didn't bring me any pants.

Heck, the button I grab is in the middle. Up to one. No.

That's not it. One more thing.

"God," she retreats. "I've always wanted to get into a hospital."

"What?" I look up at her chin. I'm still on her on Joy's bed, my legs are far away and almost hit my bed.

"That was totally on my checklist." She looks down. "Me and Kristopher have never done anything like this." This is a blow to my whole body: the lower half that wanted it, and the upper half that warned me about it. I can't think of what to say: Please don't compare me to Kristopher? Please don't mention Kristopher? Which checklist? So I say, 'Uh... um...' "Sex!" I hear from the door.

It's joy, it's time.

"Sex! Sex in my bed! Children make sex in my bed!" He runs over to us; I jump off Emmah and hold up my hands because I think he would hit me, but he grabs me and holds me by his square smelly body and carries me like a porter into the corner of the room.

'Um, Joy-'

"Dariez, who is that?" Emmah screams.

"I live here! Your terrible girl corrupts - my friend!" Joy sets me down, turns around and stands in front of Emmah with her arms crossed, guarding me. "You're leaving!" He points to the open door.

"There is no door!" Emmah looks at it. On a kind of incredible girl - Joy - she got up, smoothed out her outfit and collected her purse near Joy's pillow. She has already pulled out her phone; It flashes at her side. She gestures at me.

"There's a door, yes," I say, tiptoeing over Joy's shoulder. "We just didn't close it-" "Don't talk to her!" Joy turns around and shakes my finger. "She tries and does sex in my bed!"

"It wasn't just me, okay?" Emmah bends her face to him.

He turns back. "In case you didn't notice, Dariez was on top of me. And we didn't want to have sex." "Girl is the seductress. My wife leaves me; I know."

"Dariez, I'm out here."

"Uh, okay!" I answer in Joy's back. "Ah-" I'm trying to figure out how to sum it up. "I like going out with you... but I don't really like you as a person..." "Yes, the same here," says Emmah.

"What's going on here?" It's Paullie. He shadows the door.

"Joy, what are you doing? And excuse me, young lady?"

"I was about to leave," Emmah says.

"You're the visitor to Dariez, aren't you?"

"Not anymore."

"What happened in here?"

"Nothing," says Joy. "Everything is fine." He steps aside, turns around and gives me what he thinks is a wink through his glasses.

"Yes, absolutely." I understand. "Joy just walked in and was surprised to see two kids in the room."

"Well, he should be," Paullie says, "because you shouldn't have visitors in your room. Don't let it happen again, okay?"

"No problem."

"Yes, because you won't see me again," Emmah says, and Paullie gives her an incredulous look as she walks away from him, trudges down the hallway, and slams her shoes shut with every step.

He shrugs.

"All right," he says to her back. "Log off on your way out, miss."

"Dariez, what kind of girl will put up with this... Damn?" Emmah turns around, spreads her arms and points to the hall as if she possesses it as she withdraws. "Be quiet, Doomba!" shouts President Armelio from somewhere. She turns around and doesn't glance back.

"Huh," Paullie says. "Beautiful girl. All cool, guys?"

We nod like kindergarten children. "Yes."

"Don't let this happen again, Dariez."

"I won't."

"Otherwise you'll be here for a long time." Paullie walks away from the door; Joy waits a few moments and then turns to me.

"Dariez, I'm sorry I only have very important beliefs about sex."

"No, I see. You did something good."

"You're not in trouble, are you?"

"No, I'm fine. You handled it perfectly, boy." I stretched out my hand to get a slap in the face from him, but he interprets that as a handshake attempt, so I take the initiative and turn it into a hug, a big, smelly one. His glasses smack against me.

"I'm trying to get Italian music in the hospital," he says. "You give me an idea. But they don't have any. Now I'm resting." And he climbs back into bed, rearranges his sheet, rolls into a fetal position, and stares through me.

I look at the door. Right there, with her bright green eyes wide open, is Joy.

"I just have a few questions for you," Joy says, and at seven o'clock quickly walks up to the chair I call my conference chair since I've been meeting up with ~Sped~ kids in it. I wonder what else happened in that chair - kids probably peed on it, licked it, drummed their heads against it and screwed around in it and spat out gibberish. That gives me comfort. It feels like a chair with some history.

I didn't think Joy would show up, so I almost didn't come - but then I decided I didn't want to regret anything. I'm done with those; Regret is an excuse for children who have failed. When I come out into the world from now on, when I start to regret something, I will remember that anything I could have done will not change the fact that I was in a psychiatric hospital. This is the greatest regret I could ever have. And it's not so bad.

I rush out to talk to her, but she flies into her room and closes her door. I run towards it and knock, but there is no answer, and when Paullie walks past me and takes a look, I have to stop knocking.

I look at the clock in the hallway and sigh. There are five. Two hours after our second date.

Joy seems to be asking me for a comment. But I'm amazed at what it looks like. New clothes: tight blue jeans that have a dangerously low cut and a splinter of white underwear sticking out above them. Does the underwear look like it has pink stars on it - do girls' underwear have pink stars? ... And I almost stare before my eyes are pulled from

the soft curve of her belly to her T-shirt, wrapped against her with a kind of mystical feminine force, reading I-HATE BOYS.

How is it that girls suddenly come to me hotly dressed?

Above the shirt is her face, bordered by blond hair, which is pulled back and highlighted by her cuts.

"Uh... Why did you wear this T-shirt?" I ask. "Is this a message to me?"

"No. I hate guys, not you. And that's one reason: they're so arrogant. Why is that?" She stands with her hands on her hips.

"Well..." I think. "Do you want a real, honest answer?" My brain works better than before. It has bagels and soup and sugar and chicken in it. It fires almost like it used to.

"No, Dariez, I want a big, stupid, wrong answer." Joy rolls your eyes. I think their breasts roll in sync with them. The breasts of girls are so amazing.

"Wait, you didn't ask a question!" I grin. "A point for you."

"We're not playing the game, Dariez. We wanted to do it, but I'm too angry."

"Okay, well, damn..." I'll start. "What did we talk about?"

"Why boys are so arrogant."

"Right. Well, you know, were born into the world when we saw that we were just a little bit ... We tend to have things a bit easier than girls. And we therefore tend to assume that the world was built for us and that, you know, we are the culmination of everything that came before us. And then we're told that a little bit of that attitude is called balls and that balls are good, and we kind of take it from there."

"Wow, you're honest," she says and sits down. "An honest asshole." Yes! She sat down! "Who the hell was this girl?" "A girl I know."

"She's pretty." (It's amazing how girls can say this and make it the most damning insult.) "Is she your friend?"

"No. I don't have a girlfriend. I never had a girlfriend."

"So-o, she was just a girl you hooked up in your room?" "You saw, hm."

"I've seen it all: from out here to your roommate's bed."

"What, you followed me?"

"I'm not allowed to?"

"Well, no-"

"Don't you like it?" She leans into it. "You don't like poor little girl" - she throws up a small bo-peep voice, flutters her hair - "follow big, da- Dariez through the station?"

"It's not an award, it's a psychiatric hospital." But yes, yes, I like it when you follow me; Yes, that's great. "I can't believe I didn't notice you. ...' I think of the flashes of joy and time - with Emmah, if I've ever looked down the hallway or looked behind me.

"You were in a state of excitement; That's why."

"Good. You want to know who she was?"

"No. I've lost interest."

"Did you?"

"No! Tell me!"

"Okay, okay, she was this girl I've known for a long time, and she came in here-"

"Just overwhelmed by desire for you?"

"Yes, sure, exactly; she came overwhelmed with lust and I took advantage of her." I snap my hand. "No, what happened is that she came here lonely and confused, I think, thinking that she belonged in a place like this... '

"That was pretty funny when your roommate caught you.

That kind of made the whole thing worthwhile."

"I'm glad you think so."

"You will never be a good cheater. You're going to be one of those guys who get caught on the first try."

"Is that good?"

"You didn't even close the door. How do you know the girl?"

"She's been my best friend's girlfriend since we were thirteen."

"How old are you now?"

"Fifteen."

"Me too."

I look at them again. There is something about children who are the same age. It's as if you were piped out in the same shipment. You have to stick together. Because deep down, I believe that my year was special: it produced me.

"So, you ____ have your best friend, girlfriend?"

"No, they broke up."

"When?"

"Uh, a few days ago."

"She moves fast!"

"I think," I think aloud, "she's just one of those girls who didn't have a boyfriend." "Some of us, we would call these girls sluts. Do you think she had a boyfriend when she was eight?"

"Mutterschaf."

"Maybe she -"

"Stop! Stop! I don't want to hear it."

"It happens." Joy looks at me.

I nod and pause and let that sink. This is actually happening.

"Um... How are you?" I ask.

"You think you're really smart, don't you?"

I laugh. "No. That's one of the reasons I came here. I thought I was stupid."

"Why do you think that? You're in a smart school."

"I wasn't feeling well there."

"What did you get?"

"Dreiundneunzig."

Oh." Joy nods.

"Yes." I crossed my arms. "I think you're really smart. You'll probably get good grades."

"Not really." She puts her chin in the palms of her hand like someone in a painting. "You're not very good at giving compliments."

"Was?"

"I'm smart! C'mon." "You're attractive too!" I say. "Does it work?"

You are attractive! Did I say that yet? I said it the other day, didn't I?"

"Attractive? Dariez, real estate is attractive. Houses."

"I'm sorry, you're beautiful. What about that?" I can't believe I'm saying it. We'll both be out of here in two days; That's why I say it. No regrets. "Nice is fine. There are better ones."

"Okay, okay, cool." I crack my neck

"Ewe-www. " Was?"

"Don't do that. Especially if you want to compliment me."

"Good, okay. What are better words than beautiful?"

She puts on a southern accent: "Go-geous."

"Okay, okay, you're beautiful."

"That sounds terrible. Do it my way: go-geous."

I do.

"You can't even do a southern accent? Oh my God, are you even from America?"
"Give a break! I'm from here!" "Knox?"

"And."

"This neighborhood?"

"And."

"I have friends here.

"We should meet one day-."

"You are so terrible. Try other compliments.

"OK." I dig deep. I didn't understand. "Uh..."

"You don't know anymore?"

"I'm not good with words."

"You see, that's why math freaks don't have daughters."

"Who said I was a math freak? I told you that my grades are.

"You could be one of those nerds who aren't smart. They are the worst.

"Listen," I interrupt him. "I'm really glad you're here to talk to me, and I've met a lot of kids here."

"Oh-oh," she said. "Is that the part where everything gets serious?"

"Yes," I said. And when I say it, the way I say it, I see that she understands that I really want to be serious. I can be serious now. I've been through serious shit and I can be serious like someone older.

"I love you very much," I begin. No regrets. "Because you're funny and smart and because you seem to like me." I know that's not a good reason, but I can't help it; When a girl likes me, I tend to like her back.

She says nothing. I tilt my head towards her. "Uh, do you want to say something?" "No. No! It's good. Keep going." "Well, okay, I've been thinking about how to say that. I like you for all of this, but I also kind of like you for the cuts on your face-"

"Oh no, are you a fetishist?"

"Was?"

"Are you like blood fetishists? There has been one here before. He wanted me to like his queen of the night or something.

"No! It is not like that. It's like this: When kids have problems, you know... I come here and see that children everywhere have problems. I mean, the kids I've made friends with are pretty much a bunch of gangsters, old drug addicts, kids who can't keep a job; But then every few days someone new comes along who looks like he just came out of a business meeting.

Joy nods. She saw them too: the grubby boy who came today with a stack of books as if it were a reading treat.

The boy who came yesterday in a suit and practically told me that he had heard voices and that they were really annoying; They didn't say anything scary, but they always said the stupidest things while he was on trial.

And not only here: everywhere. My friends are all calling me now: this one is depressed, this one is depressed. I look at what doctors spend, and some studies show that one-fifth of Americans have mental illness, and suicide is the second killer among teens and all that crap... I mean, everyone is.

"What are you getting at?"

"We carry our problems differently. As if I weren't talking, I stop eating and vomit all the time-"

"Did you vomit?"

"Yes. False. And I stopped sleeping. And when I started, my parents noticed, and my friends noticed that they were laughing at me, but I was able to travel around the world without really revealing what was going on. Until I get here. Now it is said: Something is wrong. Or was it wrong because I feel like it's getting better.

"What does that have to do with me?"

"You're there for your problems," I said. "You put them on your face.

She stops, puts her hand in her hair.

"I cut my face because too many ~Sped~ too many ~Sped~ kids wanted something from me," she tries to explain. "There was so much pressure, it was -" "Something to respect?"

"Exactly."

"The kids told you were sexy and then suddenly they treated you differently?"

"Right."

"How?"

She sighs. "You have to be the prude or the bitch, and if you choose one, the other kids hate you for it, and you can't trust anyone anymore because they're all after the same thing and you see that you can never be the same again..."

She puts her face in one of those faces that might laugh or cry – they use so many ~Sped~ of the same muscles – and leans forward.

"And I didn't want to be there," she says. "I didn't want to be part of this world."

I catch her leaning against me, feeling for the first time the soft dimple in her body. "Me neither."

She puts her arms around me and we stand from our two chairs, like a house built on it, and I don't move my hands at all and "I wasn't okay there". "What did you get?" "Ninety-three." "Oh." Joy nods. "Yes." I said to my poor. "I think you're really smart.

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"You're there for your problems," I said. "You put them on your face.

She stops, puts her hand in her hair.

"I cut off my face because the kids wanted something from me for ~Sped~-too ~Sped~, " she tries to explain. "There was so much pressure, it was -"

"Something to respect?"

"Exactly."

"The kids told you were hot and then suddenly they treated you differently?"

"Right."

"How?"

She sighs. "You have to be the prude or the bitch, and if you choose one, the other kids hate you for it, and you can't trust anyone anymore because they're all after the same thing, and you see that you can never be the same again..."

She puts her face in one of those faces that might laugh or cry – they use so many ~Sped~ of the same muscles – and leans forward.

"And I didn't want to be there," she says. "I didn't want to be part of this world."

I catch her leaning against me, feeling the first joy of time - the soft dimple of her body. "Me neither."

She puts her arms around me and we stand like a house built on our two chairs, and I don't move my hands at all and neither do she.

"I didn't want to play the smart game," I tell him. "And you didn't want to play the beautiful game."

"The pretty game is worse," she whispers. "No one wants to use you to be smart."

"The kids wanted to use you?"

Someone did it. Someone who shouldn't.

I'm stopping.

"I'm sorry."

"It wasn't you."

"Shall I not touch you?"

"No, no, you didn't do anything. It's good. But yes."

It happened. And I lied before.

"About what?"

"It doesn't matter what kind of surgery I had. I did it with half a chisel, Dariez. It will leave scars. I will have scars for the rest of my life. I didn't know what I was doing. I just wanted to leave the world a little bit after that... this thing... and now I can never get a job or anything. What will they say when I go to an interview? Setting looks like..."

"She sniffs and laughs and snot comes out." ... Like a Klingon?"

"There are places in California-Emmah where they speak

Klingon. You can get a job there.

"Stop it."

We still hold each other. I don't want to look up. I keep my eyes closed. "There are also anti-discrimination laws. They can't hire you if you're qualified. But I look like a freak now."

"I told you, joy," I said in her ear. ' Everyone has problems. Some kids hide their bullshit better than others. Run away. They will look at you and think they can talk to you, and you will understand, and you are brave and you are strong. And that's you. You are brave and strong.

"You get better with compliments."

"No, I am nothing; I can hardly hold back the food.

"Yes, you're thin. She laughs. "We have to fatten you."

"I say."

"I'm glad I met you."

"You are naked and honest, joy; That's who you are." The words come to my mind as if they had always been there. "And in Africa, your scars would be greatly appreciated."

She sniffs again. "I didn't like seeing you with this other girl.

"I know. '

"You love me more, don't you?"

"Right."

"Why?"

I'm pulling away from her — maybe for the first time — in my life I've ended a hug — because a certain amount of eye contact is necessary.

"I owe you so much more than I owe her." You opened my eyes to something. My real eyes are closed on Joy's shoulder for so long that the room is dazzling. But as they readjust, I see the professor watching us from her door, holding the handshake with one hand and his shoulder with the other.

"That's what I wanted to show you. I reach under my chair to save something for our meeting - I had it there as an enrichment. I didn't think the date would go like this; I thought it was Joy yelling at me and

that I should do something drastic. But now I can do something drastic and it will be like the icing on the cake. I pull out my couple's card brain and show it to them.

"It's beautiful!"

"It's a boy and a girl, you know? I didn't do my hair, but you see how one has a female profile and the other is male. They lie down, not on top of each other, but only next to each other, floating in space. You've sketched legs and arms on the sides, but that's the whole point of my brain maps — you don't have to spend a lot of time with your legs or arms. What they have is full of heads and complete with swirling bridges and intersections and squares and parks. These are the most elaborate I've ever done: split arteries, alleys, Mill Run Road, roundabouts. -Switches, tunnels and toll booths. The paper is 14' x 19' and I had room to make the cards huge; the bodies are small and unimportant; The key element that catches your eye (because I kind of understand now, that's how the artworks are) is a towering bridge between the two heads, longer than the Kinzua Bridge, even with railing rollers like crushed ribbons at each end.

"Maybe this is my best yet," I said.

She examines him; I see the red fading in his eyes. There are no tear streaks – I still haven't seen any real tear streaks on anyone. Her tears flowed straight into my shirt; They are now cooling down and rubbing against my shoulder. "You suggested that I do some childhood things," I continue. "I did this when I was a kid, and I forgot how much fun it was."

"I bet you've never done them like that."

"No, well, it's easier because I don't have to finish the cards."

"It's beautiful."

"Thank you for starting. I owe you a lot.

"Thank you. Can I keep it? She looks up. "Not yet. I need to fix it. I get up, stretch my back and shrug my shoulders.

You are, Soldier.

Yes, my Lord!

"But, uh, I was wondering if I could have your phone number so I could call you when we get out of here."

She smiles and her cuts outline her face like cat whiskers.

"Smart."

"I'm a boy," I say.

"And I hate boys," she said.

"But a boy is different," I said.

"Maybe a little," she said.

Humble is back at dinner. He has completely new clothes, a clean-shaven face and eyes that do not open completely; He settles down at his usual table under the TV in the dining room, which everyone has left empty during his absence. Joy is also there, at the next table, with her back to him; I go in, greet them both, grab the tables, put them together and sit between them, smiling.

"Joy, I don't know if you had the chance to meet Humble.

"Not really," she said. She is always smiling. From our date, I hope.

"Humble, joy. Joy, humble.

"Uh-huh..." He said, squinting his eyes. "These cuts on the face are trippy."

"Thank you?" They shake hands.

"You have a good handshake for a girl," Humble said.

"You have a good one for a boy.

My dinner consists of beans, hot dogs and salad, with cookies and pears at the end. I'm attacking it.

"So, where did they take you?" I ask between bites.

"Over the hall to geriatrics," Humble said.

"With the old children?" Joy asks.

"Yes. That's where they take you if they need to drive you crazy.

"Where did you hear the term 'crazy'?" Joy asks.

"Hit? "Humble tears a piece of lettuce out of his teeth with his thumb.

"No, she thinks you're saying 'Wack,' like 'it's Wack,'" I explain.

"Crazy, crazy, hacked is the same word. It's an old word. I had an uncle named Wacky, what are you joking? Boy, don't start with me. This child has many problems.

"Yes, I know," Joy said. And she bumps her knee against my thigh. Impressive. One girl hasn't done that to me since fourth grade. "He's a mess."

"I know," Humble said. "It's because he's too smart for his own good. He comes here; He is exhausted. I've seen it before. I see it all the joy, but in kids in their twenties, thirties. This boy is so smart that he burned himself half the time. As a teenager, he has a midlife crisis."

"Forget the midlife crisis," I say. "It's about the sixth life crisis. "

What's that?"

"Well..." I look at Joy. She's not going to hit me with her leg again? I don't know if I want to talk. I don't want to bore him. But I know I won't tease Humble, and if I don't tease him either, that would be a big win.

"Well, first there's the quarter-life crisis," I said. "It's like the characters in Friends Kids freak out that they're not going to get married. The twenty-year-old. It's probably true that children have quarter-life seizures; I don't know, but I know things are going faster now. You used to have to wait until you were 20 to have enough opportunities in your life to freak out. But now there is so much to do. Buy, and with it ~Sped~ ways to spend your time and joy, and with it ~Sped~ specialties that you need to start very early in realistic ballet, okay, joy, when did you start ballet?"

"Four".

"Okay. I started with Tae Bo when I was six years old. So there are ~Sped~ kids who fish for success and so ~Sped~ colleges you're supposed to go to, and so ~Sped~ women you're supposed to have sex with-'

"You have to freak them out," Joy said from across the room. "Have

Have you been approached? Humbly asks.

"Huh, eat your salt."

"What, badass? How about I hit you on the head, how would you-'

"Boys." Joy stands up and brushes her hair away from her cheeks, which are not only cut off, but also red. Everyone is silent.

"So," I continue, "instead of a quarter-life crisis, you have a fifth life crisis when you're eighteen and a sixth life crisis when you're fourteen. I think that's what a lot of kids have."

"What you have."

"Not just me. It's the... uh... Should I continue?" "Yes," Joy said.

"Well, there are a lot of kids who make a lot of money with the fifth and sixth life crises. Suddenly, they have a lot of frightened consumers ready to buy face cream, designer jeans, SAT preparation courses, condoms, cars, scooters, self-help books, watches, wallets, stocks, whatever... All the crap that twenty-year-olds used to buy, now ten-year-olds buy it. They doubled their market!

Joy pulled up a chair next to me. "This boy is fucking crazy," he said.

"I hope they keep it here," Humble said.

"So very soon." I think ahead. "There will be the seventh and eighth crises of life. Then, finally, a baby will be born and the doctors will look at it and immediately wonder if it is not equipped for the world; If they decide that doesn't look happy, they'll put him on antidepressants and put him on that particular drinking path.

"Hm," Humble said. I think he'll continue with something, but instead he says, 'Hm.'

Then- how... "Your problem is that you have a depression-driven view of the world." He bows. "And rabies?"

"I was never very angry."

"Why?"

"It's so much angrier in my head than it could ever be from the outside." "Extra cookies!"

She is one of the nurses. We are all queuing up; It is oatmeal and peanut butter. As I pull my feet forward, Joy nudges me from behind; When I turn to her, she turns her face away as if I'm trying to kiss her, but she won't let me.

"Your problem," I said.

"You're stupid," she replies.

I did it. I spoke - and she loved me; She thought I was smart. I'm starting to make a plan. As soon as I have my cookies, I go to the phone to call Dad, who is already bringing Blade II tomorrow night. I want him to bring something else as well.

It's your last full day in the hospital, that's what I think when I wake up - no one takes my blood today (it's only happened once since Sunday), so I don't get up very early, but I'm always the first in the hallways. I take a shower and think what life would be like if the hot water didn't come out of the shower-head when you want it. I've tried cold

showers and they're wonderful when they're done, but during the process they feel like a form of animal cruelty. But again, if you take a cold shower, you should get in and out as soon as possible. That's why they do it in the army.

It's true! Do you want to shoot, soldier?

I don't think so... Lord.

Come on, what's wrong with you? You have a lot to do for yourself; Don't want to continue?

I need a cold shower to get things done?

It's true. Less time in the shower, more on the battlefield.

Good.

I can. I stretch out my hand and slowly turn the temperature knob to the left, then I decide that I will never do it gradually, so I have to do it like a band-aid - jerky. The water goes from lukewarm to freezing cold so fast that it feels like it's burning me. I bend my groin out of the way, but I know that's cheating, so I push it back into place while I soap myself furiously. Leg: up!

Down! Another leg: up! Down! Step: uh, rub-rub-rub. Chest: wipe. Arm: down! Return! Other arm: down! Return! Neck, face, turn around, wash yours and I'm gone! Directly to the towel. I wrap it around me and tremble.

I can't wait to put on my clothes so that my socks stick to my wet feet. I go out to talk to Paullie.

"How are you?"

First cold shower."

"From the day?"

"From my life."

"Yes, that will hit you."

"What's new?"

Paullie holds her paper in her hand. It looks like a new candidate is running for mayor of Knox, promising to give a lap dance to anyone who votes for him. He's a multi-billionaire, and at \$100 a lap dance, he thinks he can secure the vote. Many women support him.

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movie is cool; Many vampires die. No announcement about my music, but again it hadn't arrived yet.

I took my Zolofit out of my little plastic cup and drew brain maps by the window in the corner of the hallway next to My-a Joy. I processed my phone messages, began to think seriously about what I would do as soon as I got out – would I buy a cup of coffee? Walking to the park? Go home and start emailing?

-And-

That got me thinking about email, and suddenly I was really glad I had Dr. Ross to talk to. "I'm fine, I think."

She looks at me calmly and firmly. Maybe she is my anchor.

"What makes you doubt, Dariez?"

"Excuse me?"

"You said you were fine, you think." Why do you only think about it?

"It's an expression," I said.

"Not the right place if you don't feel better, Dariez."

"Okay, well, I was thinking about my email."

"And?"

"I'm really worried about having to go out and look at it. Phones I'm caught up with, but emails could be pretty deadly."

"Deadly... How can an email be deadly, Dariez?"

"Good." I straighten up, take a deep breath. Then I remember something. "Do you know how hard I had to start and stop my sentences before?"

"And."

"Not recently."

"Really?"

"Yes, it's like the opposite, how the words can come out of me, like they did when I was in trouble in class." "What was..." She focuses on her notepad to write this.

"A year ago, I joined Executive Pre-Professional."

"Now tell me about the email." "The email." I put my hands on the table. "I hate this. Right now, I haven't checked it in five days, okay?"

" Since Saturday. She nods.

"It's true. Now, what do the children think to reach me? They're kids who probably already have an idea of where I am, because

Emmah told Kristopher the number and he got it.

"Okay, a great source of shame for you."

"Yes. But even if someone has no idea where I am, what does he think? Five days. They say: He's crazy. He must have taken an overdose or something. Everyone expects me to respond immediately, and I am unable to do so.

"Who sends you emails, Dariez?"

"Kids who want homework, teachers, school clubs, announcements about charities I should volunteer with, invitations to soccer games, basketball games, pre-pro squash..."

"So they are mostly school-related."

"They are all school-related. My friends don't email me. They are calling."

"Why don't you just ignore the emails?" "

I can't!"

"Why not?"

"Because then the children will be insulted!"

"And... What happens then?"

"Well, I'm not going to be able to join clubs, get credits, participate in stuff, get extra credits... I will fail."

"At school."

"Right." I'm taking a break. No, it's not exactly school. That's what comes after school. "To live."

"Oh." She pauses. "Life."

"Right."

"To fail in school is to fail in life.

"Well... I'm at school!" It's the only thing I'm supposed to do. I know that many famous kids didn't do well in school, like James Brown; He dropped out in fifth grade to become an artist, I respect that... But I won't be. I won't be able to do anything but work as hard as I can – and compete with everyone I know – to get there. And now school is the only thing I have to do. And I'm away from email and I can't do it.

"But your definition of school is not one thing, it's ~Sped~ different things, Dariez: extracurricular activities plus sports plus volunteering. Not to mention the homework.

"Right."

"How worried would you say you're about all this, Dariez?"

I think back to what Joy said, that fear is a medical thing. The email has stayed in the back of my mind since I've been here, the stubborn certainty that when I go out, I have to sit in front of the computer for five or six hours to go through everything I've missed, respond to it by reversing the order, because that's how it happens and therefore it takes the longest Joy- to answer the kids, which removed me in the past e-mails to further. And then, as I answer them, others will come, and they'll sit on my pile and laugh at me, challenge me to answer them before I get used to it, and tell me I need them, as opposed to one or two of the emails that are actually about something I care about. These will be saved to the end, and by the joy - I have the joy - to take care of them, they will be so overwhelmed that I only have to apologize: I'm sorry, my boy. I couldn't reply to my email. No, I'm not important, just incapable.

Dariez ?

"Very anxious," I reply.

"Email fear and chess talk... These are issues that you have already mentioned. They plague you very much. "I know. I'm sweating."

"Is that you?"

"Yes. And I haven't sweated in a long time.

"You were away from your tentacles."

"Right. Not anymore. Now I can go back and they are all there for me.

"Do you remember what I asked you last time, Joy, whether you found anchor here or not?"

"And."

She pauses. To ask a question, it's often possible for Dr. Ross to just state that she might ask a question.

"I think I've found one," I sigh.

"What's that?"

"Can I get up and take it?"

"Absolutely."

I leave the office and walk down the hallway, where Joy leads a recruit on her welcome tour – a black boy with crazy teeth and a stained blue tracksuit.

"This is Dariez," Joy said. "He's young, but he's at that level. He makes drawings.

I shake hands with the boy. It's true. I make drawings.

"Um-being", guys...

"That's his name," Joy explains, rolling his eyes.

"Your name is not Dariez; it's also being um, the boy said.

I nod, interrupt the handshake and continue to my room. It's literally like walking away from a monster – the further I get away from the thought of emails and Dr. Ross and the fact that I have to walk away from here and return to executive preprofessional, the calmer I get. And the closer I get to the brain maps, this stupid little thing I can do, the calmer I become. I walk past Joy - he stares at me and tries to sleep - and takes my art off the radiator lid. I put him in a pile in front of Joy and Um-Being who now explains what his real last name is Green and that's what he needs, a green return to the office.

"I like it here," I said to Dr. Ross.

"This Piece?"

"No, the hospital.

"When you're done, you can volunteer."

"I talked to guitarist Neil about it. I think I will try. I can get school loans!"

"That's why you should volunteer, Dariez-"

"No, no... I shake my head. "I'm just kidding." "Oh." Dr. Ross cuts off his face with a big smile. "So, what do we have here?"

I put them on the table. There are now two dozen. No crazy breakthroughs, just variations on a theme: pigs with brain maps that look like Pittsburgh, my relationship with Joy through the curved bridge, a family of metropolises.

"Your artwork," she says.

She flips through the pages and says "Oh, my God" to the particularly good ones. I built this pile last night, not just for Dr. Ross, for anyone. Brain maps have a certain order. Since I created them, they indicate that they need to be stacked for presentation.

"Dariez, they are wonderful."

"Thank you." I sit down. We were both standing. I didn't even notice it.

"You started it because you did it when you were four years old?"

"Right. Ok. Something... Like you.

"And how do they feel about you?"

I look at the pile. "Impressive."

She leans forward. "Why?"

I have to think about it, and when Dr. Ross makes me think, I don't feel ashamed and try to ignore him. I look to the left and stroke my chin.

"Because I make them," I said. "I do them and it's over. It's almost like, you know, peeing?"

"Yes... Dr. Ross nods. "Something you appreciate." "Right. I do; it is successful; It feels good, and I know it's good. When I'm done with one, I feel like I've done something and the rest of my day I can spend doing anything, stupid, emails, phone calls, everything else.

"Dariez, have you ever considered the fact that you could be an artist?" "I have other stuff too," she further. What did she say?

"At first I thought of this eternal candle, like a candle on the floor with another candle hanging upside down over it, and when the first candle melts, the wax is melted by some kind of hot containment unit and is pumped to the second candle and drips down like a stalactite stalagmite thing. and then I thought: What if you fill a shoe with whipped cream? Just a boy's shoe filled with whipped cream? It's pretty simple. And then you could continue: a T-shirt filled with Jell-O, a hat full of applesauce... That's art, right? Stuff. What would you say about artists?"

She giggles. "You seem to enjoy what you're doing here."

"Yes, well, duh, it's not the hardest thing in the world."

"You're not sweating now."

"That's a good anchor for me," I say. I admit. I admit it. It's a stupid thing to admit it. It means I'm not practical. But on the other hand, I'm already in the crazy bin; How practical will I become? Maybe I have to give up the practical. "That's right, Dariez. That can be your anchor.' Dr. Ross stares at me and doesn't blink. I look at her face, the wall behind her, the door, the blinds, the table, my hands on the table, the brain maps between us. I could do the one above a little better. I could try to do some wood grain there with the streets. Wooden knots in children's heads. That could work. "That can be my anchor." I nod. "But..."

"Was, Dariez?"

"What should I do with school? I can't go to the executive pre-professional for art."

"I'm going to throw a wild performance at you." Dr. Ross leans back, then forward. "Have you ever thought about going to another school?" I stare ahead. I didn't have that. I honestly didn't.

Not once, not in my whole life, not since I started there. This is my school. I worked harder to get in than I did for anything else. I went there because I could be president. Or a lawyer. Rich, that's the point. Rich and successful.

And look where it took me. A stupid year — not even one, like three-quarters of one — and here I am with not one, but two bracelets on my wrist, next to a shrink in a room next to a hill where a boy named Umm walks around. If I do this for another three years, where will I be? I will be a complete loser. And what if I continue? What if I'm okay, living with depression, going to college, going to college, going to graduate school, getting the job, getting the money, kids and a wife, and a nice car? What kind of crap will I be in? I'm going to be completely crazy.

I don't want to be completely crazy. I don't like being here. I like to be a bit crazy: enough to volunteer here, not enough to never, never, ever come back.

"Yes," I say. "Yes, I thought about it."

"When? Right now?"

I smile. "Absolutely."

"And what do you think?"

I clap my hands and stand up. "I think I should call my parents and tell them I want to go to school." "Visitor, Dariez," Paullie sticks his head into the dining room. I push my chair back from the table where I play poker with My-a Joy and Joy and Armelio after lunch. My-a Joy has no idea how to play, but we deal him cards and he plays them face down and smiles and we give him more chips (we use scraps of paper; the buttons are locked due to our recklessness) whenever he pockets or chews his.

"I'll be back," I say.

"This boy, so busy," Armelio says.

"He thinks everything is important to him," says Joy.

"I woke up and the bed burned!" Say my-a joy.

We all look at him. "All right, my joy?" I ask. "My mother hit me on the head. She hit me on the head with a hammer."

"Oh, wow." I turn to Armelio. "I heard him say things like that downstairs in the emergency room. Has he ever talked about it?"

"No, nuh-uh, buddy."

"Hey, My-a Joy, it's okay." I put my hand on his shoulder. At the same time, I bite my tongue. You may think that someone is funny and wants to help them at the same time.

"She hit me on the head," he says. "With a hammer!"

"Yes, but you're here now," says Joy. "You're safe. No one is going to hit you on the head with anything."

My-a Joy nods. I hold my hand on his shoulder. I keep my tongue down a little, but I make a little puffing noises while trying not to laugh, and he looks up and notices. He smiles at me, then laughs himself, then takes his cards and slaps me in the back.

"It will come to Yah," he says.

"That's right. I know it will be."

I apologize from the room and walk down the hall. At the very end is Kristopher, who holds the record I want. Dad didn't have it.

"Hey, boy," he says sheepishly, and as I get closer, he leans it against the wall. He's a dick, but I'm not perfect either, so I come up to him and hug him.

"Hey."

"Well, you were right. My father had it Italian

Masters Volume Three."

"I appreciate it so much." I shall record the Minutes. It has an image on the cover of what looks like the Nile at dusk, with a palm tree reveling left, reflecting the bright moon, and the purple sky rolling up from the horizon.

"Yes, I'm sorry for everything," Kristopher says. "I... uh...

I've had a weird few days."

"You know what?" I look him in the eye. "Me too." "I bet." He smiles.

"Yes, from now on, when crap goes down, you can say, 'Oh, Dariez, I've had a few bad days,' because I'll understand what you're talking about."

"What's it like in here?" He asks.

"There are children whose lives have been messed up for a long time, and then there are children like me whose lives for ... Do you know... shorter."

"Did they put you on new drugs?"

"No, the same ones I was on before."

"So-o- do you feel better?"

"And."

"What has changed?"

"I'm going to leave school."

"You're what?"

"I'm done. I'm going somewhere else."

"Where?"

"I don't know yet. I will discuss it with my parents. Somewhere for art."

"You want to make art?"

"Yes. I've done some here. I'm good at it."

"You're pretty good at school too, boy."

I shrug my shoulders. I don't need to explain this to Kristopher. He has been degraded from most important friend to friend, and he has to earn it. And you know what else? I don't owe children anything, and I don't need to talk to them anymore than I think I need.

"What's wrong with Emmah?" I ask... Must proceed carefully here.

"I got your message that things were bad."

"They trained. It was my fault. I completely freaked out because she was taking pills, and we broke up for a few days."

"Why did that freak you out?"

"I don't need any of that in my life, you know? I mean, it's bad enough with my father."

"He's taking medication?"

"Every form of medication in the book. Mom too. And then me, with the pot... If you put it in a nutshell, there's no one in the household who isn't seriously drugged except the fish."

"And, you didn't want your girlfriend to be too."

"Their smoking is one thing; I only have... I can't explain it. I think you'll have to date someone for a long time - to understand. When you're with someone and then you learn that they... Take something every day, you ask yourself - how good can you be for them?"

"That's pretty stupid," I say. "I met this girl here-"

"Oh yes?"

"Yes, and she messed it up, messed up as much as I did, but I don't take that as an insult. I see this as an opportunity to connect."

"Yes, good."

"Children are messed up in this world. I'd rather be with someone who messes it up and talks openly about it than someone who's perfect and... Do you know... ready to explode."

"I'm sorry, Dariez." Kristopher looks at me deeply and holds out a hand to slap. "I'm sorry I was a slut to you."

"You were a slut." I slam him in the hand. "This album partly makes up for that. Just don't do it again." "All right." He nods.

We stand still for a minute. We didn't move away from the core of the hallways near the entrance of Six North. The double doors I walked in through are eight feet behind him.

"Well, listen," he says. "Enjoy the record. And - hey, they have a record player here?"

"You still smoke here, Kristopher. They're kind of back in time."

"Enjoy it and be in touch, and I'm sorry again. I guess you won't chill for a while."

"I don't know. Maybe I'll never chill again."

"Did you almost kill yourself to get in here?" asks Kristopher.

"That's what Emmah told me."

"And."

"Why?"

"Because I wasn't able to deal with the real world."

"Dariez, don't kill yourself, okay?"

"Thank you."

"Just... Don't do it."

"I won't."

"See you soon, boy."

Kristopher turns around and the nurses open the door for him. He's not a bad boy. He's just someone who hasn't had his stay on Six North yet. I bring the recording to Paullie to store behind the nurse's station.

Six North doesn't need a PA system because of President Armelio, but it does have one that regularly stands for the simple and rhythmic messages "Lunch is served,"

"Medication," and "All smokers in the smoking lounge; Smokers, get your smokers." This afternoon there is a longer message, courtesy of Monieec.

"Ladies and gentlemen, this afternoon our patient Dariez Gilner, who is leaving tomorrow, will draw his artwork for everyone on the floor. If you want your artwork by Dariez, come to the end of the hallway by the dining room.

End of dining hallway, five minutes. Have fun!"

I sit in the back chair, at the window that looks out over the avenue that crosses the street where I live, so close to my real life. I look over to my conference chair, where I meet with my parents and Joy. I have set up a second chair as an art table in front of me, with stacks of board games on it and a chessboard on top. It's a little flimsy, but it will be enough.

President Armelio is the first to approach. He walks up, with barrel chest and self-confident, like a torpedo. "Hey, buddy, that's great! You want to make me one of your heads with the cards in it?"

"That's right."

"Well, let's go, buddy. I don't have all day!"

Right. Armelio will have to be made fast because he is fast. I sketch the outline of his head and shoulders without a second thought and start with his brain map. Highways, that's what Armelio has in its six-lane highways that run parallel and roam through a city, with sense and minimal driveways. It has no quiet little streets or parks; They are highways and a grid and not rivers either.

The highways are hardly connected to each other, because Armelio does not confuse his thoughts; He has one and does it and then he moves on to the next. It's a great way to live. Especially when the biggest thought is to want to play cards. Maps need to be represented somewhere in Armelio's brain. So I sketch some streets into an ace of spades right in the middle - it's not a big ace of spades, but Armelio gets it.

"Spades! Buddy, I'll crush you into spades."

I put my initials on it, big and bold, "CG" like "computer generated".

"I'm really going to keep that," Armelio says. "You a good boy, Dariez." He shakes my hand. "You want my number when you leave?"

"Sure-" I take out a piece of paper.

"It's an adult home," Armelio says. "You'll have to ask Spyros what my other name is." He gives me the number and walks to the side, and there is Ebony, with her cane and velvet pants smacking her lips.

"I heard... that you made your brain for kids," she says.

"That's right! And do you know who was the first person to say they were brains?"

"Me!"

"Absolutely. Well, look" - I point to my pile of work on the floor - "now I have it all."

"So-o- I get paid, right?" Ebony laughs.

"Not quite; I haven't made it yet. As an artist."

"I know. It's tough."

"So-o- you just get a brain map for yourself, okay?"

"Good!"

I stroke her head freehand and look at her, not the paper. I look down and it's pretty good. Ebony's brain ... What's in there? Many circles, for all the buttons she stole. She was a madwoman with those buttons. Didn't play around. Quite a schemer. And with all her gaming skills, she needs a strip, like Vegas. So-o- I get a big boulevard in the middle and lots of roundabouts around it, with circular parks, circular shopping malls, small county lakes. It looks less like a city and more like a necklace with a central ribbon and tons of jewels clenched together.

"It's pretty!" She says.

"And you're done." I give it to her.

"You like to do that, don't you?"

"Yes. It helps, you know... with my depression. I came here with depression."

"Imagine having depression when you were eleven," says Ebony. "If all my children were in this hall, this hall would be full, I tell you."

"You have children?" I ask in a low voice.

"I had thirteen miscarriages," she says. "Imagine that." And she looks at me without the humor or attitude she usually shows, just with big eyes and empty questions.

"I'm so sorry," I say.

"I know. I know it's you. That's the thing."

Ebony shuffles away and shows her portrait ("That's me! See? Me!") She leaves no phone number. Humble is the next.

"Alright, boy, what kind of scam were you doing here?"

"It's nothing." I'll start with Humble's bald head. Bald heads are simple. You know, if I had to now, I think I could handle the bottom tip of Knox. I'm looking at

Humble. He raises his eyebrows. "Make me look good, okay?"

I laugh - there's industrial chaos in Humble's head.

I don't make small blocks, just big ones — the kind of blocks where you find lumber shops and factories and bars where Humble hangs out and works. I put the ocean in there to represent his hometown of Bensonhurst, which borders the ocean where he used to meet all these girls. Then I splash it with highways, wipe out the roads and put them over the top, throw in crazy intersections for no reason, make the whole thing look violent and random, but also powerful and true — the kind of ghost that could come up with some great stuff if used properly. When I'm done, I look up.

"I think it's okay." He shrugs.

I laugh. "Thank you, humble."

"I want you to remember me," he says. "No joke. If you're a big artist or whatever, you have to invite me to one of the parties."

"It's a deal," I say. "But how am I supposed to get in touch?"

"Oh, right, I have a number!" Humble says. "I will stay in Seaside Paradise; It's the same home Armelio will go to, but I'll be on a different floor." He gives me the number; I put it on the same sheet as Armelio.

"They won't be in contact," Humble says.

"I will," I say.

"No, you won't; I can tell. Mais c'est d'accord (But I do.) They have a lot to do for you. Just don't burn out again." We shake hands. Next comes

Joy. "Hey, girl!"

"Don't you dare call me that? That's very kind of you."

"The least I could do. They're all such cool kids."

"You're like a celebrity now. Everyone wants to know if I'm your girlfriend."

"And what do you tell them?"

"No!" And then I leave."

"Good call."

"So-o- what are you trying to pull? They've already made one of them for me. You just said it's not finished yet."

I pull out the one I made for her, with the boy and the girl connected by the bridge, and write my phone number on the back.

"Oh my God."

"Now it's done." I smile and get up. I lean in and whisper, "It took me twice as long as everyone else. And I'll make you even better when I get out-"

She pushes me away. "Yes, as if I want your stupid art."

"You do." I lean back. "I saw how you saw it before."

"I'll keep it to make you feel good," she says. "That's it."

"Good." She leans in and kisses my cheek. "Thank you, really."

"You're welcome. Hey, what are you doing tonight?" "Well... I thought I was hanging out in the psychiatric hospital. What about you?"

"I have big plans," I say. "We have a movie coming in-"

"Right, I don't see this stupid movie."

"I know." I whisper. "But when it's halfway done, do you want to meet in my room?"

"You're kidding."

"No. Seriously."

"Your roommate will be there! He's always there!"

"Trust me. Come into the room."

"Will you try to make out with me?"

"If you need to know? Yes."

"I appreciate your honesty. We'll see."

I embrace her; She holds the brain map wrapped around me with her hands. "And I already have your number," I say.

"You don't get a second chance if you lose it," she says. "I'm not giving out this number twice."

I take a quick look at her as we move away from each other and she moves to the side.

Joy is next.

"Who is that behind you?"

"Huh, who do you believe?" Joy answers.

"Come together, guys. I'll make you both at once." "Cool," says Joy, standing aside. Joy is standing next to him and I start drawing her, her shaggy hair and loose dresses make for great outlines.

"So-o- he draws us?" Joy asks Joy.

"Be quiet, all right?"

"Where did you guys hang out?" I ask Joy without looking up from the paper. "Back when you were garbage heads?"

"What? You're going to draw that?"

"No." I look up. "I'm just curious. What neighborhood?"

"It was the Lower East Side, but don't draw the Lower East Side," says Joy. "I don't want to go back there."

"All right, fair enough. Where do you want to live?" "On the Upper East Side, with all the rich kids," Joy replies.

"Huh, me too," says Joy.

"Wait, no, you'll get a guitar," I say.

"Oh, cool."

I'll start with Joy's and Joy's brains. With Joy, it's fun to play a guitar in a street grid - some diagonal streets that meet for the body, and then a large, wide boulevard for

the neck, a park for the head. Then I turn to joy. I know the Upper East Side pretty well; It's in Knox and the big thing it has is Central Park, so I draw that on the inside left of its head. Then I put in the stately grid of rich streets. I know the

The Guggenheim Museum is up there somewhere; I mark that with an arrow and then I put an "X" right next to it, on a corner where an apartment probably costs \$20 million, and write Joy's notepad. "Joy's Pad! That's right! That's where I'm going." He raises his arms. "Further up." "Great fun." I give them the piece.

"Who gets what?" Joy asks. "You want us to tear it up?"

"No, boy, we should keep it together because we're friends," says Joy. "I'll make a photocopy."

"Where's the copier in here?"

"There is none! I'll do it when I get out."

"Where is that supposed to leave me?"

"With a copy!"

"I don't want a copy!"

"Would you listen to this boy? Nothing is good enough for him-"

"Hey, joy," I interrupt. "Anyway, I can get your and Joy's phone numbers to talk to you after you leave?"

Joy starts to say something, but she leans in and stops him:

"That's not a good idea, Dariez."

"What? Why?"

He sighs. "I've been in and out of this place many times, haven't I?"

"And."

"There are good things about this place; I mean, the food is the best; There are good children here... But it's still not a place to meet kids."

"Why not? I met you guys and you're cool!" "Yes, well, even worse if you try to call me or get together and find out that we got out or got shot, or even worse, come back here or just disappeared."

"That's a pretty negative view."

"I've seen it before. You only remember us, okay? We meet in the outside world; It just ruins it. You will be ashamed of me and me... "He's smiling. ' ... Maybe I'm ashamed of myself. And I might be ashamed of you if you don't keep your stuff together."

"Thank you. You're sure, no numbers?"

Joy shakes my hand. "If need be, we'll meet."

Joy shakes my hand. "What he said." The last boy in line is My-a Joy.

"I tell you, what shall I say? You play these numbers-' 'It's going to come to you!' I answer.

"It's the truth!" He grins.

Ah, my joy. What's in My-a Joy's brain? Chaos. I make his almost bald head and shoulders and then begin to walk the most complicated, unnecessary, wild highways from ear to ear through him. I connect them in complicated spaghetti ramps. Five highways meet in a nexus; I have to erase and redraw the ramps a few times. Then I inserted the grid - a grid created by a hyperactive designer, with blocks going in all different directions.

When My-a Joy's brain map is ready, it might look like the best catalog of a schizophrenic mind, but one that somehow works.

"Let's go," I tell him. He sits in a seat he has taken next to me to watch me at work.

"It's coming to Ya!" he says and takes the card. I want him to finally open up, call me Dariez, tell me we've gotten together, but he's still My-a Joy – his vocabulary is still limited.

We lean back in our respective chairs; I dozed off a bit. Making art on Dvoid is tiring. But the last thing I see before I go to sleep is My-a Joy, who unfolds his brain map next to me and compares her to Ebony, who says hers is naturally much prettier. That's not a bad thing to go to sleep.

"Dariez, are you okay?" Ask Mom. I shake up and have a brief fit that everything was a dream, everything - the whole Sixth North Bit - but then I wonder where would the dream begin? If it were a nightmare, it must have started somewhere before, I went bad; It would be like a year-round dream. You don't have that. And if it was a good dream, it would mean that I was still where he started, leaning over my parents' toilet or lying in

bed listening to my heart. I didn't need that. "Yes! I'm-whoa.' I sit up. They're all there - Dad, Mom, Sarah.

"Are you forcing yourself to sleep?" Ask Mom. "Are you depressed?"

"Are you on drugs?" Sarah asks. "Can you hear me?"

"I took a nap! Jeez!"

"Oh, okay. It's six o'clock."

"Wow, I slept for a while. I drew my brain maps for children."

"Oh, boy," Dad says. "That doesn't sound good." "What are brain maps?" Sarah asks.

"That's her art," says Mom. "That's why he wants to change schools. Making this art makes you happy, doesn't it, Dariez?"

"Yes, do you want to see?"

"Absolutely."

I take the pile next to me and pass it around. That's really what I created the stack for, I think; to show my parents. "Some of the best ones were the ones I just made for the patients." "Very original," says Dad.

"I like this one," Sarah says, pointing to the pig that is almost Pittsburgh in it.

"You put a lot of time into it, I see," Mom says.

"Right, that's the thing: you don't need a lot of time," I explain. "I'm starting to get a little bored of them; I want to switch to something else." "So, how do you feel, Dariez?" Dad puts the pile back on the floor.

"You look much better," Mom says.

"And to?"

"Yes," says Sarah. "You don't look so freaky."

"I used to look crazy?"

"She doesn't mean crazy," Mom says to the two of us. "She just means that when you were downstairs, you looked a little under the weather.

Isn't that right, Sarah?"

"No, he looked crazy."

"A flat affect, that's what doctors call it." I smile. "Right, you don't have that very often anymore," Sarah says.

"So-o- you want to leave school?" Dad takes us back to the real things.

"I don't want to stop." I turn to him. "I want to change."

"But that means leaving the school you're at—"

"He can't deal with the other school!" Sarah says. "Look—"

"Wait a second. I can talk," I say. "Boys." I look at all three in turn. "One thing they're doing here gives you a lot of time to think. I can't explain it; As soon as you walk in, time just slows down—"

"Well, you don't have any interruptions, that's probably it—"

"Besides, I think the clocks are a little off the mark—"

I wave my hand. "The point is, you have time to think about how you got here. Because obviously nobody wants to come back. I don't want to come back'

"Good. Me neither," says Dad. "What I said last time, about actually wanting to be here; That was a joke."

"Right. Hey, did you bring the movie?"

"Of course. I can watch some of it with you, right?"

"Absolutely. Anyway, I was thinking about when things started to get bad for me. I realized: It started after I started in high school." "Uh-huh," Mom says.

"That was the happiest moment of my life. The happiest day. And from then on, it was all downhill." "Right, this happens to a lot of adults," Dad says. "Do you want to stop interrupting him?" Sarah interrupts. Dad folds his hands behind him and straightens his back.

"It's okay, Sarah. I only have... I think I focused on getting into executive pre-professional because it was a challenge. I wanted to have that feeling of triumph. I never really thought about having to go to school."

"So you want to make art," Mom says.

"Well, let's consider it. I never really liked math. I was good at it, but only because I liked having basic information in front of me to get through, to achieve that

sense of accomplishment. I never really liked English. That" - I point to the brain maps - "that's something else. That's something I love. So I do better."

"You'd better love it," Dad says. "Because it's a hard life. It's mainly the artists who end up in places like this."

"Well, then he must be an artist; There it is!" Sarah says.

"Heh. It's pretty simple." I get up. "Look around. I tried to go to the best high school in town.

And this is where I landed."

"That's right." Mom looks behind her. Solomon hurries across our field of vision.

"If I don't make a big change, I'm going to come out here wondering how anything is different from before, and I'll end up right back here."

"Right," says Mom. "I'm with you, Dariez."

"Which art school do you go to?" Dad asks. "Knox

Art school? It's easy to switch with my notes-'

"Oh, but Dariez, this is the school for kids who are all messed up," Dad says.

I look at him. "Yes? Daddy?" I raise my wrist, show him the bracelets. I am proud of them now. They are true, and children cannot screw with them. And when you tell the truth, you become stronger.

Dad stands still for a minute, looks down at his feet, and then looks up. "Okay," he says. "We will do whatever we have to do.

However, you will need to stay in school until you switch.

That will be... At least until the end of the year, I think."

"I'll take care of it," I say.

"I know you will. We will help."

"Dinner, get ready for dinner!" President Armelio is approaching us. "Dariez and his family, dinner is almost here!"

"How did you eat?" Ask mom as I stretch my legs.

"It was me. That's good."

"It's wonderful, Dariez."

"Okay, so I'll leave the DVD here with you." Dad hands it to me. "And I'll come back to see it when you're done with dinner. When will that be?"

"Seven is good. But visiting hours end at eight. You won't be able to see the whole thing."

"We'll see how long I can stay. You will be surprised."

I swallow. I don't want him to stay that long.

I'll make sure Paullie gets him out.

"See you tomorrow," Mom says. "The staff tells us to pick you up early in the morning before I go to work." "I'll be ready."

"We have a lot of good food at home."

"See you when I get home from school." Sarah hugs my waist. "I'm so glad you're back." I pat her head. "Are you ashamed of this place?"

"Yes, but whatever."

"So am I," I say. "It's just a good kind of embarrassment."

Mom and Dad are dressed up to take me out; I wear what I wore all the time - here some khaki pants and my tie-dyed T-shirt and my clothes shoes, my Rockport's, the ones kids complimented me every now and then that made me feel like a professional patient. Mom never brought a change of clothes.

You're here early because Dad has to work; He wanted to see me before he left. Mom stays home today to see that I'm okay. Then, tomorrow, Friday, I'll be back at school, but with the official note that I can come to the nurse's office at any time - if I feel depressed. I don't have to go to class next week; That is school policy. I am encouraged to leave, but they don't want to overwhelm me. It's a good deal.

It's 7:45 a.m. I've taken my last vital signs — 120/80 — and I'm standing at the core of the hall next to the nurses' office, looking at the double doors I walked in five days ago. It seems like five days; It doesn't seem too long or too short; it seems like I spent the bliss here that I have spent. Kids are always talking about really shocking quotes, really- information, real news - but in here I really had -- REALLY-. Armelio shakes my hand one last time.

"Good luck, buddy."

Humble says I should stay a little longer.

"You're going to lose it from the outside, boy."

Joy murmurs at me. It's too early for him. The professor tells me to keep making art.

Paullie says he heard from Neil that I'm thinking about volunteering, and he hopes to see me sometimes.

My-a Joy completely ignores me.

Ebony says you should beware of liars and cheaters and always respect children.

Joy comes out of her room at 7:50 a.m., just as breakfast rolls in and my parents step out of the nurse's office where they have signed papers. "I'm outside in the afternoon," she says. She wears sweatpants and a T-shirt. "Call me tonight?" "Sure." I touch her number in my pocket, next to her two notes I've saved.

"How do you feel?"

"I feel like I can handle it."

"Me too."

"You're a cool girl," I say.

"Your kind of fool, but with potential," she says.

"That's all I'm trying to do." "Dariez?" Ask Mom.

"Oh, hey guys, ah, that's joy. We have to be friends here." "I saw you last night," Dad says, shaking her hand.

"It's a pleasure to meet you," Mom says. None of them take a second look at the cuts on her face. My parents have some lessons.

"Nice to meet you, too," she says.

"Are you still in high school?" Dad asks.

"Dolphin," she says.

"A lot of pressure, hm," Mom says.

"And."

"I think they might have to change the whole system. Look, two kids like you, smart little kids sent here because of the pressure."

"Mama."

"I'm serious. I'm going to write to my congressman about it." "Mom."

"I'm leaving," says Joy. "See you, Dariez." And she dives her leg up behind her as she turns away and waves at me -- that counts as a kiss, I think. If my parents weren't here, it would be a kiss.

"Are you ready?" Ask Mom.

"Yes. Bye, everyone!"

"Wait!" From the bottom of the hall, Joy moves forward as fast as he allows, which is not very fast, a kind of speed walk, and hands me the plate.

"Thank you, Dariez. This boy, your son," he turns to my parents, "he helped me."

"Thank you," Mom and Dad say.

I hug Joy and take in his smell one last time.

"Good luck, boy."

"As you go through life, you think of me and hope that

I feel better."

"I will."

We break up and Joy wanders towards the dining room and the smell of food.

I look at my parents. "Let's go."

It's incredibly simple. The nurses open the doors for us and there I'm outside looking at the "Sh-h! Healing in Progress" poster that I saw when I walked in. The bank of elevators stands guard in front of us.

"Girl," I tell them. "Can you go home yourself, and I'll go after you in about a minute?"

"Why? Are you okay?"

"I just want to walk a little bit on my own."

"Are you thinking about it?"

I look at the table when they leave. I need some medication. I look up and see patients queuing up at the desk next to the phone, the nursing station, eagerly spending the times in their little ways — President Armelio bucking from foot to foot, Joy — a hand that refuses to work — before he gets pills in small plastic cups. Beth/Charles and Becca finally appear at the end of the line, chatting and gesturing, and Beth/Charles blows me a kiss. I don't think I need to stand behind them in line right now. By the way, all I take is Zoloft in the morning; if they wanted me on something in the afternoon, they would have told me.

When Becca and J/C are gone and I'm still shell-shocked at the table, another sign appears at the window, this one from below up as if it were hoisted by spider threads:

DON'T WORRY. HE/SHE/IT GETS EVERYONE, WELCOME TO SIX NORTH!

When I go looking for her, she's not there. I ask the nurse who completes her dosing tasks if I need medication, and she says I'm not scheduled for it. I ask her if I can have something. She asks what I need them for. I tell her, to deal with this crazy place. She says that if they had pills for that, they wouldn't need these kinds of places, would they?

"What's it like?" Mom asks, with a carrying bag with toiletries in hand, with Dad and Sarah by her side. We sit at the end of the right H-leg, me in one chair opposite the three. Visiting hours are from 12 to 8 p.m. on Saturdays.

Sarah won't let me answer.

"It's like One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest!" she says excitedly. She is dressed in jeans and a fake suede jacket for Six North. "I mean, all those kids look like... serious lunatics!"

"Sh-hh," I say to her. 'My-a Joy is there.' My-a Joy sits behind her by the window, sitting with his arms crossed as usual, out of his shirt and in a clean navy robe.

"Who is My-a Joy?" Mom asks eagerly.

"The boy I came in with downstairs. I think he's schizophrenic."

"Doesn't that mean he has two personalities?" asks Sarah, turning around. "Like, he's not just Joy-a; he's also Molly or something."

'No, you'd be surprised, that's another one', I raise my eyebrows. 'Joy-a my-a's is just a bit... spread.' Joy-a sees me looking at him and smiles. "I tell you, you play those songs, it's coming to Ya!" he chirps.

'I think he's talking about Lotto numbers', I explain. "I've been trying to figure it out."

"Oh my gosh." My sister covers her face.

"No, Sarah, don't do that, look," mom says. She turns around. "Thank you, Joy."

"I tell you: it's the truth!"

"I love this place," Mom turns back. "I think it's full of good kids."

"I like it." Dad leans forward. 'When can I participate?' But when no one laughs, he leans back, claps his hands, sighs.

"Is that a transvestite?" asks Sarah. J/C is in the hall, as forty meters away, and I don't know for life of mine how Sarah suspects something there that I couldn't see on the pointless range.

'No, listen now-'

"Is it?" Dad stares.

'Guys!'

'Transvestite!' My-a Joy screams. He does it at top range - I've never heard him so loud before. The whole room, which is only me, my family, J/C, and the older professor-like girl with the glasses, stops and starts.

"I'll tell you once, it's coming: it's coming to Ya!"

J/C starts walking towards us. "Are we talking about me?" he asks in his boyish voice. He waves to my-a Joy.

"Hey, my-a Joy." He comes straight at me and my sister.

"Dariez, your name is, right?" "Yes," I mutter.

"Wow, is this your family?"

"Yes." I tip my palm at each of them - it's at the level of the fringes on his pants. "My dad"-he sticks out his lip-"my mother"-she nods, all smiles-' and my sister, Sarah--she extends a hand.

"Oh my God, so delicious!" J/C says. "I'm Charles." He shakes with everyone. "They're going to take very good care of your son here. He's a good boy."

"What about you; what are you doing?" Dad asks. I kick him. Doesn't he know what not to ask?

"It's okay, Dariez!" J/C touches my shoulder. "My god, did you just kick your father? I've never even done that." He addresses dad: "I've bipolar, sir, and I had an episode, and they brought me here. I'm going back upstairs today. But the doctors here are very attentive and the lead time is large." 'Beautiful', says mum.

'Of course,'-J/C gestures to us-' it's a lot better if you have support from family. They want to make sure they're discharging you in a safe environment. I don't have that.' He shakes his head. "Dariez, you're very lucky." I look at it: my safe environment. I honestly wouldn't be surprised if I found them in Six North. "Well, I'll leave you guys to your afternoon," says J/C. He walks away slowly.

My-a Joy makes an unreadable high-clattering howl.

"That's applause, isn't it?" Daddy asks, throwing a thumb behind him. "I like that."

"Those are great pants," Sarah says.

"Okay, so let's get started, Dariez," mom says.

"What do you need?"

"I need a calling card. I need you guys to pick up my phone and leave it plugged in so that the calls register. I need some clothes, like what you got before, Mom. I don't need towels; they have. Magazines would be good. And a pencil and paper, that would rock." 'Simple enough. What kind of magazines?'

'Science magazines! He loves that,' dad says.

"He may not be up for science magazines right now," mom replies. "Do you want something lighter?" "Do you want Star?" asks Sarah.

"Sarah, why would I want Star?"

"Because it's great." She reaches into her purse — her first, black, a recent mom purchase — and unrolls a shiny pink monstrosity, complete with photos of the most recent spectacular celebrity breast outing in public.

I hold it up for my-a Joy.

"Mm-hm!" he says. "I'll tell you! I'll tell you! It's coming on yah!"

"That's very nice," says the professor girl with overheard eyes, who somehow I didn't know had migrated right behind me.

"Oh, excuse me," she looks up. "I didn't listen to your conversation at all." She walks into her room.

"Eh... "Sarah says.

"I'll take it," I say. I put it under my chair. "I think the floor will enjoy it."

"Is it me, or are you starting to develop a kind of loyalty to the tribe?" Dad asks.

'Sh-hh.' I smile.

'Dariez, the next agenda: did you call Dr Jarnerny?'

"No."

"Did you call Dr. Ross?"

"No."

"Well, they both need to know where you are, for health insurance reasons and because they are your doctors and they care about you and this will be very important to them."

"Their numbers are in my phone."

"Well, let's call them; we grabbed your phone from the front," mom grabs in her bag.

"No!" Daddy grabs her hands. "Don't take the phone out!"

"Don't be ridiculous, honey. Dariez is the one who shouldn't have it, we shouldn't."

"Well, uh, I don't think we want to get our son in trouble. This is not the kind of place where you want to be sent to a time-out."

I look at him.

"That's not so funny."

"What? Oh, sorry," he says.

"No, Dad, seriously. It's not ... I mean, this is serious business."

'I'm just trying to lighten the mood, Dariez-'

"Well, that's what you're always trying to do. Let's just not do it here.'

Dad nods, looks me in the eye to death; slowly and regretfully he banishes all laughter and jokes from his face, and for once he is just my father, looking at his son who has fallen so low. "Okay, then." We remain silent.

"Is that the truth, my-a Joy?" I ask without looking at him.

"It's the truth, and it comes to yah!" I smile.

"We'll handle the phone later," Dad sums up.

'Next agenda?' Mom asks.

'How long I'll be in this, I think.'

"How long do you think?"

'A few days. But I haven't seen the doctor yet.

Dr. Mahmoud.'

"How is he doing? Is he good?"

"I don't know, Mom. You've met him for as long as I have. He's going to make rounds soon and I'm going to talk to him.'

"I think you should stay here until you're better, Dariez. You don't want to come out early and have to come back; that's how you get 'into the system'.

"Right. I don't. I think that's a big part of places like this: they make them so you don't want to come back.

"How's the food?" asks Sarah.

"Oh, I almost forgot," I look at my family. "I am ... I know I shouldn't be proud of this; it's really sad that this is my big achievement of the day... but I ate everything at lunch.'

"Do you?" Mom gets up, pulls me up and hugs me.

"Yes." I withdraw. "It was a chicken. I ate two portions of it.'

"Girl, that's a big one," Dad gets up and shakes my hand.

'No, it's not, it's very simple, everyone does it, but for me it's like a stupid triumph-'

"No," mom says, looking me in the eye. "What is a triumph is that you woke up this morning and decided to live. That is a triumph. That's what you did today.' I nod to her. Like I said, I'm not a screamer.

'Yes, because if you had died...' Sarah is like, "that would have sucked." She rolls her eyes and hugs my leg.

I sit down again. 'Once the food is in front of you, it's like: eating. I mean, they're professionals here; they know how to take children and put them into a routine that gives them something to do.'

"That's right," mom says. "What are you going to do now?"

'I think there are activities-'

"Hey, Dariez, is this your family?" President Armelio takes the stage. His half hair lip and hair shock my sister, but his relentless enthusiasm for just-I don't know-living-would take the fear away from everyone.

He shakes all hands and says we are a beautiful family and I am a good boy, he can tell you that.

'Dariez is my friend! Hey, buddy-you want cards?'

President Armelio holds up a pack of playing cards as if he had fished the net out of the sea.

'Yes, absolutely!' I say. I get up. When was the last time I played card? For the test, probably-for high school.

"Okay!" Armelio says. "My kind of boy! Let's do it. I've looked and looked: no one here likes to play cards like me! What do you want to play? Kick? I'll crush you, buddy; I will crush you."

I look at my parents. "We'll call you," mom says. "And hey, what about sleeping?"

"I'm wired now," I say. "But I crash. I'm starting to get a headache.'

"Headache? Buddy, as soon as I crush you in kicks, you get a much bigger headache!" Armelio walks to the dining room to set up the cards.

"You see," Sarah says, hugging me.

"Bye, son." Dad shakes my hand.

"I love you," mom says. "I'll call you with the doctors' phone numbers."

"And bring a phone card."

"And I take a phone card with me. You're hanging in it, Dariez." "Yes, I will."

And as soon as they turn the corner, I go into the dining room and learn to play kicks for the rest of the afternoon, which Armelio does crush me in.

I'm afraid to call. The phone on Six North is a hustle and bustle, with Joy and the blonde burned-out type, which I learn is called Joy, getting calls from, I assume, their respective female counterparts. Joy starts his phone calls happily and says:

'Baby' a lot, but then he gets angry and knocks down the phone with the words 'bitch'; Paullie tells him not to; Joy walks away leaning back with a particularly powerful aura of non-caring.

Five minutes later, another phone call comes in for him and he's back at 'Baby'. However, he doesn't even pick up the phone; President Armelio has that task.

When he answers, he always says "Jack's Pub," and then he searches for who the call is for.

At a rare moment when Joy and that girl whose name I can't remember leave the phone open, I walk over with the phone card mom brought me twenty minutes after she left.

Dad and Sarah. I pick up and hear the dial tone, dial the 800 number for the phone card... and then stop. I can't.

I just don't want to deal with it.

Children on the outside world do not know what happened to me, I am now in a kind of stasis. Things are under control. But the dam will break. Even if I'm here until Monday, the rumors will go up in the air and the homework will pile up.

Where is Dariez?

He's sick.

He's not sick, he's gotten alcohol poisoning because he can't stand real booze.

I heard he took someone's pills and was shocked. I heard that he realized that he is gay and that he is getting the hang of it.

I heard that his parents sent him to another school.

He couldn't handle it here anyway. He was always such a loser.

He sits in a panic at his computer. He can't move or anything. He is catatonic.

He woke up and thought he was a horse.

Well, whatever, what's question three?

There were two messages on my phone when I came in, and now there are probably more, each requires a callback, and the callback may require a different callback tentacles — which take me right back to where I was last night. I can't go there, so I wait. I can wait five minutes. But then Joy hangs on the line. And then I wait another five minutes. And the messages are piling up. And we're not even talking about email. What kind of hellish assignments did my teachers email?

"Excuse me, are you using the phone?" asks the giant black girl with the stick as I stare at it.

"Yeah, uh." I take the receiver in my hands. 'Yes, of course. Yes, I am.'

"Okay." She smiles, rolls her gums, shows no teeth. I start calling, enter my PIN, enter my number.

"Enter your password, then press the pound sign."

I obey.

"You have three new messages. 'One more than before. Not so bad.

"First new message: message marked as urgent." Uh-oh.

"Hey, Dariez, it's Emmah, I just, uh ... we talked, and you sounded really bad. I just wanted to make sure you did it right, and since you don't answer - it's like two AM, I mean, why would you answer? But I'm a little worried that you might have started doing something stupid because of me. Don't. I mean, it's sweet, but don't do it. Okay, that's it, I'm with Kristopher, he's a total dick. Bye.'

'To delete this message-'

I hit 7.

"Next post."

'Dariez, it's Kristopher, call me back son! Let's chill-' I hit 7-7.

"Next post." "Hello, Mr. Gilner, this is your science teacher, Mr. Reynolds. I took your phone number from the student guide. We need to talk about the lack of your laboratories; I miss five-' 7-7.

"End of messages."

I put the phone down as if it were a dangerous animal. I pick up again, call home. Can't stop now.

"Sarah, can you get Emmah and Kristopher's phone numbers out of my cell? And look through the recent missed calls for something from Knox; I have to call my science teacher." "Sure. How's it going there?"

I look to the left. A Hasidic Jewish boy, complete with the white pants, yarmulke, brushes hanging from him, braided hair and sandals, runs down the hallway towards me. Pieces of red food dot his dark beard and his eyes are wild and unhinged. He says to me, "I am Solomon."

"Um, I've heard from you. I'm Dariez, but I'm on the phone." I cut the receiver.

"I would like to ask you to please keep it low! I'm trying to rest!" He turns around and runs away, holding his pants.

'O-ooh! Solomon introduces himself to you!" scolds the girl with the stick. "That's big." "It's normal," I tell my sister.

"Okay, here." She gives me the songs of Emmah and Kristopher and the teacher; I write them on a piece of paper that Paullie gave me. I should have known that earlier. Emmah's looks well written, healthy and useful. The science teachers look erratic and hateful. Maybe I won't be able to call him until tomorrow.

"Thank you, Sarah-bye."

I hang up and look at the lady with the stick.

"Hey, I'm Dariez," I say.

'Ebony.' She nods. We shake hands.

"Ebony, it's cool if I call one more time?"

"Of course."

I choose the 800 number, enter my PIN, choose Emmah.

'Hello?'

"Hey, Emmah, it's me."

"Dariez, where are you?"

It's funny how kids ask that as soon as they get you on the phone. I think it's a byproduct of cell phones: kids — girls and mothers in particular — want to pin you down in physical space. The fact is that you can be anywhere on a mobile phone and it shouldn't matter where you are. But it becomes the first thing children ask.

"I'm at a friend's house. In Knox.'

I also wonder how ~Sped~ lies mobile phones have contributed to the world.

"Uh-huh, Dariez. I don't think so.'

"What do you mean?" I wipe the sweat from my forehead. The sweat starts again. This is not good. I sweated in the ED, but I didn't sweat at lunch.

"You're not at a friend's house. You're probably at a girl's house.'

I look at Ebony. She smiles and leans forward on her stick.

"Yes, totally."

"I know you. Last night you had me on the phone; tonight you're crocheting with a girl.'

'Sure, Emmah-'

"Seriously, how are you? Thanks for calling back. I was worried.'

"I know, I understood your message."

"I don't want you to panic about me. I think you just need some time to decompress a little bit, and not think about me and think about someone else. Because I know we might be good to each other, but I'm with someone else, you know?'

"Right... um... I wasn't afraid of you last night, actually.'

"No?"

"No, I was panicking about, like, much bigger things. I had a kind of crisis and I wanted to reach someone who understood.'

"But you asked me if we could have ever been together."

'Well, I tried to clarify that, because Ya' knows ... I wanted to do something stupid.'

She drops her voice: 'Kill yourself?'

'And.'

"You wanted to kill yourself over me?"

"No!" I scold. "I was just in a really bad place, and you were part of it because you're a part of my life, just like Kristopher is a part of it and my family is part of it, but I thought you could clarify something for me before I..."

"Dariez, I'm so flattered."

"No, you have a wrong idea. Don't be flattered."

"How could I not be? I've never had a boy who wanted to kill himself for me. It's the most robotic thing."

"Emmah, it wasn't about you."

"Are you sure?"

I look down and the answer is right in my chest and it rebounds. 'Yes, of course. I have bigger problems than you do.' "Ah, okay."

"And you shouldn't assume that everything is always about you."

"Whatever. What's wrong with you?"

"Nothing. Everything is a lot better now, actually."

"You act like a total dick. Do you want to come out tonight?"

"I can't do that."

"Did Kristopher call you? We have a big party at his house."

"Right. I'm probably not going to party for... if... for a while. As always, maybe."

"Is everything fine now?"

"Yes, I'm just... I'm figuring things out."

"At your friend's house."

"That's right."

"Are you in a crack hole or something?"

"No!" I cry out, and just then President Armelio walks up to me:

"Hey, buddy, do you want to play kicks? I will crush you."

"Not now, Armelio."

"Who is that?" asks Emmah.

"Leave him alone, he's talking to his girlfriend." Ebony taps Armelio with her stick.

"She's not my girlfriend," I whisper to her.

"Who is that?"

"My friend Armelio."

"No, the girl."

"My friend Ebony."

"Where are you, Dariez?"

"I had to go."

'Okay...' Emmah makes her voice heard. "I'm glad you're doing it... uh... better." "I'm doing a lot better," I say.

She's done, I guess. She's done, and you're done with her.

"Behold Ya, Dariez." I hang up.

"I think that's over," I tell myself.

Then I decide to announce it in the room: 'I think that's over!' Ebony stomps on her stick and Armelio claps.

Continued: 3

Something deep in my gut, below my heart, has shifted to the left and settled in a more comfortable place. It's not the Shift, but it's a shift. I imagine Emmah with her beautiful face and small body and black hair and pudgy lips and Kristopher's hands all over her, but also with her smoking weed and the pimples on her forehead and all the time joking about children and the way she's always so proud of how she's dressed. And I imagine her.

I play cards with Armelio in the dining room until Joy sticks his head in: 'Dariez? It says on your door Dr. Mahmoud is your doctor? He makes his rounds.'

"I don't want to be here," I say to him at the entrance to my room, where I catch him before he visits Joy.

"I don't think it's the place for me."

"Of course not," Dr. Mahmoud nods. He's wearing the same suit he wore earlier in the day, although it feels like last year. 'If you liked it here, that would be a very bad prognosis!'

"Right." I chuckle. "Well, I mean, everyone is friendly, but I feel a lot better and I think I'm ready to go. Maybe on Monday? I don't want to miss school.'

Also doc, at the moment the phone messages and e-mails are piling up and the rumors are flying into the air. I just talked to this girl and I did a good job - but the tentacles are coiled and the pressure is mounting and getting ready to pounce on me when I leave. If I'm here too long, I have a lot more to do when I get out.

"We can't rush it," says Dr. Mahmoud. 'The most important thing is that you get better. If you try to leave too early- suddenly, is everything better? We doctors become suspicious.'

"Whoa. Well, you don't want the doctor who can unsubscribe you from the psychiatric hospital to become suspicious.'" "Right. Right now you look much better to me, but maybe this is a false recovery."

"A fake shift."

"I'm sorry?"

'A fake shift. That's what I call it. If you think you beat it, but you didn't do it?' "Exactly. We don't want that.'

"So I'll stay here until I have the real Shift?"

"I don't follow."

"I'll stay here until I'm healed?"

"Life is not cured, Mr. Gilner." Dr. Mahmoud leans in. "Life has traveled."

"Okay."

I am not as impressed by this as he would like. He bows back, "We won't keep you here until you've healed from something; we'll keep you here until you're stable — we call it "establishing the baseline." "Okay, when will my baseline be set?"

"Five days, probably."

A two three... "Thursday? I can't wait until Thursday, doctor. I have too much school. That's four days of school. If I miss four days, I'm so behind."

'Plus, my friends...'

'And?'

"My friends will know where I am!"

"Aha. Is this a problem?"

'Yes!'

"Why?"

"Because I'm here!" I gestured to the hall. Solomon shuffles by very quickly in his sandals and tells someone to be quiet, he tries to rest. "Mr. Gilner." Dr. Mahmoud puts a hand on my shoulder. 'You have a chemical imbalance, that's all. If you were diabetic, would you be ashamed of where you were?'

'No, but-'

"If you had to take insulin and you stopped, and you were taken to the hospital, wouldn't that make sense?"

"This is different."

"How?"

I sigh. 'I don't know how much of it is chemical. I just think depression is a way to interact with the world. Like, some kids get drunk, some kids do drugs, some kids get depressed.'

Because there are so many things that you have to do something for it.'

"Ah. That's why you have to be here longer, to talk about these things," says Dr. Mahmoud. 'You have a psychologist, don't you?'

Did you call your psychologist?'

Shoot. I knew I was forgetting something.

"You have to call; your psychologist will come here to meet you. What's her name? Or his?'

'Dr. Ross.'

"Oh!" says Dr. Mahmoud; his lips curl in a distant smile. 'Beautiful. Get Andrea down here.' "Andrea?" I never knew her first name. She keeps it a big secret. It has been embezzled on all her diplomas. She says it's part of the policy.

He waves his hand. "Make an appointment with her; then we are much closer to coming up with your treatment plan and getting you out of here as soon as possible. We're going to try it on Thursday.'

"Not before Thursday."

"No."

"Thursday," I mutter to myself, looking across the room at

Joy's sensitive lump. 'Five days, that's it! Everything will be fine, Mr. Gilner. Your life will wait. You simply participate in the group activities and call Dr. Ross. And if you get rich and successful, you won't forget me, okay?'

"Okay."

"Can you please close the door?" Joy asks from his bed.

"Joy, you are next: how is it that you always sleep, sleep– sleep?"

Dr. Mahmoud walks past me. I call Mom to report the news, and then I call Dr. Ross. She says she's sorry I took this turn worse, but it's always two steps forward, one step back.

"If this is my one step back," I say to her, "what am I going to do: win the lottery and get my TV show?"

That would be a good TV show I think. A boy who wins the lottery in the psychiatric hospital.

Dr. Ross can't come in tomorrow because it's Sunday, but she says she'll be inside on Monday. I'm equally surprised by the distinction. In Six North, it probably won't be much different.

"They say there's going to be a pizza party tonight," Humble says during dinner. Dinner is chicken tender with potatoes and salad and a pear. I eat it all. "But that's what they say every night." "What is a pizza party?"

"We all pour on the money and get pizza from the neighborhood. It's hard because no one ever has money. It's a big deal if we get pepperoni.'

"I have eight dollars."

"Sh-h. Don't announce it!" He stops chewing. "Children here have no money. I don't have two cents to rub together.'

I nod. "I've never heard that one."

"No? Do you like it?"

'And.'

"What about: I don't have a pot to piss in or a window to throw it out."

"Nope."

"What about it: I got Jack and shit and Jack left town." "Heh. No!

Where do you get them all from?"

'From the old quarter. Gimme a ringy thing.

Catch Ya on the reverse. It's the best way to talk.'

'Een ringetje, what's that-a call?'

"Don't ask yuppie questions."

Humble scans the room for kids to talk about. He likes to talk about other kids - he just likes to talk, I've discovered, but he especially likes to talk about other kids and when he does, he puts on a peculiar kind of voice that doesn't quite whisper, but has such a low monotone that no one notices. He also seems to be able to throw it, so it feels like he's speaking in my left ear.

"So I assume you've become familiar with our lovely clientele here on the floor. President Armelio is the president." He nods to Armelio, who is the first to finish eating and gets up to return the tray. "Do you see how fast he eats? If you could harness a quarter of its energy, you could power Knox Island. I'm not kidding.

He should be working in a place with kids like us. He has such a good heart and he's never down.'

"Why is he here?"

"He's psychotic, of course. You should see him when they brought him in. He screamed his head over his mother.

He's Greek.'

'Huh.'

"Now there's Ebony, She of the Ass. That's the biggest ass I've ever seen. I'm not even into the donkey, but if you were a man, you could lose yourself in that.

It's like its own municipality. I think that's why she needs the stick. She's also the only girl I've ever known who wears velvet pants; I think you have to have such an ass to wear velvet pants.

They just make them extra, extra big.'

"I didn't even notice them."

"Well, give it a while. After a few days you notice children's clothes, since they all wear the same things every day.'

'It doesn't get dirty?'

'They do laundry on Tuesdays and Fridays. Who gave you your tour when you walked in?'

"Joy."

"He should have told you that." Humbly, his head turns and then turns back. 'Now Joy and her too' they sit together at the table, just like at lunch', who were two among the biggest methamphetamine addicts in Clarion, period, in the nineties. They were called Fiend One and Fiend Two. The party only started when they showed up.'

That must have been such a feeling, even though all drugs, I think. To come into a house and have kids get up and greet you, "Okay, boy!" "You're here!" "What's going on?" That was probably as addictive as the amphetamines. Kids do that a little bit with Kristopher.

"What happened to them?" I ask.

"What happens to someone? They burned out, lost all their money, ended up here. Don't have families, don't have women's good, I think Joy has one.'

"He talks to her on the phone."

'You can't tell from that. Kids pretend to be on the phone all the time. Just like her'-he points his head at the insect-eyed girl who stood behind me when I was talking to my family: 'The professor. I caught her on the phone talking to Dr. Dial Tone. She is a university professor. She ended up here because she thinks someone tried to spray her apartment with insecticide. She has newspaper clippings about it and all that.'

Humble twist: "The black kid with the glasses: he looks pretty normal, but he has it bad. You notice that he doesn't get out of his room much. That's because he's afraid

gravity will reverse and he'll fall into the ceiling. When he goes outside, he must be near trees, so if gravity stops, he has something to hold on to. I think he's about seventeen years old. Have you talked to him?'

'Don't!'

"He doesn't talk. I don't know how much they can do for him.'

The boy looks up at the ceiling fan above the dining room, shudders and puts food in his mouth. 'Then there's my Joy.

My-a Joy has been here a lot. I've been here for twenty-four days and I've seen him come and go twice. You seem to like him.'

"We came in together."

"He's a cool guy. And he has good teeth.'

'Yes, I noticed that.'

'Pearly white. Not many kids here have that. I wonder what happened to Ebony's teeth. "What's wrong with them?" I turn around.

"Don't look. She doesn't have one, you haven't noticed? She is on a liquid diet. Just chewing gum. I wonder if she sold 'em, tooth by tooth...'

I bite my tongue. I can't help it. I shouldn't laugh at any of these kids, and neither should Humble, but maybe it's okay, somewhere, somehow, because we enjoy life? I'm not sure. My-a Joy, two tables away, notices my suffocated smile, smiles at me and laughs at himself.

"I said-yah, it's coming yah!"

'Here we go. What's going on in his head?' Asks Humbly.

I can't help it. It's too much. I crack. Juice and chicken tender pieces spray my plate.

"Oh, I've got you now," Humble continues. "And here comes the guest of honor: Solomon."

The Hasidic Jewish boy enters with his pants up. He still has food in his beard. He grabs his tray and opens a microwave packet of spaghetti and starts pushing it into his mouth, slurping, slurping moans.

"This guy eats once a day, but it's like his last day on earth," Humble says. "I think he's the most distant from anyone. He has as a direct audience with God."

Solomon looks up, turns his head from left to right, and resumes eating.

Humble drops on a true whisper. "He did a few hundred tabs of acid and blew out his pupils. His eyeballs are probably dilated."

'No way.'

"Absolutely. It is a certain cult of the Hasidic: the Jewish Acid Heads. There is a part of their sacred scriptures that tells them that it is the way to talk to God. But he went too far."

Solomon stands up, leaves his tray disgusted on the table, and leaves the room at alarming speed.

"He's like the Mole Boy, back to his hole," Humble says. "The real Mole Kids are the anorexics; you don't even see them."

'How ~Sped~ children are here?' I ask.

"They say twenty-five," Humble says. 'But that's not counting the stowaways.'

I look around me. Charles/Beth is not in the room.

"Did the, uh, you know, Charles? Has he left?" "Yes, the tranny is gone. I left this afternoon. Tranny hit you?"

'And.'

'Paullie lets him do that. Get a kick out of it.'

"I can't believe he's just gone. They give you a party when you leave, don't they?"

"No way. Kids here don't want to get out. Getting out means going back to the street or prison or trying to fish their stuff out of a confiscated car, like me. Your kind of situation, with the parents and a house: that's rare. And also, with so ~Sped~ kids coming and going, we'd be crazy to try to have a party every time. We would end up as Fiend One and Fiend Two."

My tray is a mess from spraying out food. "You're cracking me, Humbly," I say to him.

"I know. I'm great, times for everyone. It's a pity that I'm standing here instead of being paid for it."

"Why don't you try to go on stage?"

"I'm old."

"I need to get some napkins." I get up and go to Paullie, who hands me a stack. I come back, wipe my tray and start the pear.

"You have a secret admirer," Humble says. "I should have guessed. I know how you work."

"What?"

"She was just here. Look at your chair."

I get up and check it. There is a piece of paper there, face down. I turn it around and it says HOPE YOU HAVE A GOOD TIME. VISITING HOURS ARE TOMORROW FROM 19:00-19:05 I DO NOT SMOKE. "See? Your little girl with the face of the cut-up just left it." Humbly stands up. "I had a feeling. Now you're starting to look like a rival male. Maybe I should keep an eye on you."

He deposits his tray and stands in line for his medications. I fold the paper and put it in the pocket where my phone used to be.

Part: 12

'Dariez! Hey buddy! Phone!'

I'm sitting with Humble outside the smoking lounge for the 10pm cigarette break and thinking about where I was at the last 10pm: just crawling into mom's bed. Humble doesn't smoke, says it's disgusting, but practically everyone here does, including the black boy who's afraid of gravity, and the big girl, Becca, who I thought was underage. Armelio, Ebony, Joy, Joy, Joy ... no matter how nuts they all seem, they have no problem migrating to the top left corner of the hall and sitting quietly on the couches waiting for their particular brand of cigarettes, which I learn the hospital doesn't take care of — they come in with the packets themselves and the nurses keep them in a special container. As soon as they pull a cigarette out of their respective packets, they walk through a red door, past Nurse Monieec, whose job it is to scam everyone. When the door closes, the smell comes from underneath and you can hear everyone talking at once, as if they saved their words for a time when there was smoke to send them through.

"How are you doing for your first day, Dariez?" Nurse Monieec asked me five minutes ago, when she closed the door. "You don't smoke, I see."

"No."

'That's good. Terrible habit. And it happens so badly to children your age.'

"A lot of my friends smoke. I just, you know... never liked it.'

'I see that you adapt quite well to the floor.'

'And.'

'Good, good, that's so important. Tomorrow we will talk more about your adjustment and your situation and how you feel.'

"Okay."

"You have to watch out for this one," Humble said. "He's cunning."

"Oh yes?" asked Monieec.

I was looking for the blonde girl Joy, I had to think about meeting her, but she wasn't there. Neither does Solomon. Next to Humble was the girl he identified as the professor, who looked at us with her eyes tapped. Uninvited, Humble started talking to me and Monieec about this old friend of his, who, in his words, "had pigtail nipples, like curly fries, I kid you didn't have." Monieec laughed and laughed. The professor said Humble was disgusting. Monieec said it was okay to laugh once in a while, and did she have a story to share?

"Yes, we all know you had some indiscretions in your youth, Professor," Humble said.

The Professor got a dreamy look in her eyes. I almost thought she was going to have a seizure. And she said, in a light voice, with a nasal twinkle, "I had a lot of guys, but I only had one boy."

I wondered where I had heard that before when Armelio interrupted.

'C'mon buddy! The phone is for you!' "Right." I get up.

"You're lucky, buddy. It's after ten. They usually turn off the phone at ten o'clock.'

Turn off the phone. I imagine a big lever in my head, a boy heaving it down.

"What happens if someone calls and the phone is off?"

"It just rings and rings," Humble shouts, "and kids know they're not in Kansas anymore."

I walk down the hallway. The receiver of the pay phone hangs and waves. I'll pick it up.

'Hello?'

"Hey, is this the loony bin?" It's Kristopher. It's Kristopher, high up.

'How do you get this number?' I ask. The bearded boy, whom I saw rocking in the dining room when I first entered, stands in the central hall and stares at me.

"My girl gave it to me, what do you think? What's it like there, y'all?", Kristopher asks.

"How do you know where I am?"

"I looked it up, boy! Do you think I'm one? I go to the same school as you! I did a reverse number search and found exactly where you are: UMPC hospital, adult psychiatric! Dude, how would you get into an adult? Do they serve beer there?"

'Kristopher, c'mon.'

"I'm serious. What about girls? Are there hot girls around!"

I hear laughter in the background, above rap. 'Gim-me the phone!' Richard's high bleep comes through the line.

"Lemme talk!"

Richard komt in beeld: 'Dude, can you get me any Vicodin?'

Howling. Howls with laughter. And in the background Emmah protests: 'Guys, don't bother him.'

'Gim-me- Dariez, no, seriously.' Kristopher is back on. "I'm sorry dude. I... just, how are you, boy?"

"I am... okay.' I start sweating.

"What happened?"

"I didn't have a good night and I checked myself into the hospital."

"What does that mean, 'didn't have a good night'?"

The boy in my belly is back and pulling on me. I want to throw up on the phone.

"I'm depressed, okay, Kristopher?"

"Yes, I know, about what?"

"No, boy, I'm generally depressed. I'm like, clinical depression.'

'No way! You're like the happiest boy I know!"

"What are you talking about?"

"That's a joke, Dariez. You're like the craziest person I know. Remember on the bridge? But you know, the problem is that you're not chilling enough. Like even when you're here, you're always worried about school or something; you never sit back and let things slide, you know what I mean? We have a party tonight, where are you going to be?"

"Kristopher, who's in the room?"

'Emmah, Richard, Scruggs, uh... my friend Delilah.' I don't even know Delilah.

"So all those kids know where I am now."

"Dude, we love where you are! We want to visit!"

"I can't believe you."

"What?"

"I can't believe you're doing this."

"Don't be a girl. You know, if I was in the psychiatric ward, you'd call me up and go at me a little bit. It's because we're friends, boy!" "It's not a psychiatric ward."

"What?"

'It's a psychiatric hospital. It is for short-stay patients. A psychiatric ward is longer.'

"Well, you've clearly been there long enough to be an expert.

How long will you stay?' 'Until I have established a baseline.'

"What does that mean? Wait, I still don't get it: what was actually wrong with you?"

"I told you, I'm depressed. I take pills for it like your girlfriend."

"Like my girlfriend?"

'Dariez, shut up!' Emmah screams in the background.

"My girlfriend doesn't take pills," Kristopher says.

Richard shouts: 'The only thing she takes is-' The rest is cut off by laughter and I hear him being beaten with something.

"Maybe you should talk to her a little more and find out what she's actually like," I say. 'Maybe you'll learn something from it.'

"You're telling me how to treat Emmah now?" asks Kristopher. I hear him licking his lips. "What, like I don't know what this is really about?"

"What, Kristopher. What is it all about?"

"You want my girl, dude. You've wanted her for about two years. You're angry that you didn't get her, and now you've decided to get angry into depressed, and now you're gone somewhere, probably turned into someone's bitch, trying to play the pity card to get her to you... And I call you as a friend to try to lighten your mood and you hit me with all this nonsense? Who do you think you are?"

'Yo, Kristopher.'

"What."

I'm going to do a trick that Richard showed me. He did it a long time ago, and I think Kristopher has forgotten about it.

"Me."

"What?"

"Me."

'What?!'

"She, she, she, she, she—"

I pause. Hold it, hold it...

'Fuck you.'

And I put the phone down.

It hits my finger and I go into my room crying, next to Joy.

"What happened?" He asks.

"I have no friends," I say, jumping and holding my finger in hand.

"This is hard to learn."

I look out the window, through the blinds, into the night. Now I'm screwed. I run my finger under cold water in our bathroom. I didn't think I could be screwed more than last night, but here I am. I'm in a hospital. I've sunk to the lowest place I can be. I'm in a place where I'm not allowed to shave alone — even if I should be shaving organically — because they're afraid I'll use the razor blades on myself. And everyone knows it. I'm in a place where kids don't have teeth and eat liquid food. And everyone knows it. I'm in a place where the boy I'm eating with lives in his car. And everyone knows it.

I can no longer function here. I mean in life, I can't function in this life. I'm no better off than when I was in bed last night, with one difference: if I was in my bed - or my mother's - I could do something about it; now that I'm here I can't do anything anymore. I can't cycle to the Kinzua Bridge; I can't take a whole bunch of pills and sleep well for a night; all I can do is crush my head in the toilet seat, and I still don't even know if that would work. They take away your options and all you can do is live, and it's exactly like Humble said: I'm not afraid to die; I'm afraid to live. I was scared before, but I'm afraid to do even more now that I'm a public joke. The teachers are going to hear it from the students. They'll think I'm trying to make an excuse for bad work.

I get into bed and put the single top sheet over me. 'This: freaking sucks.'

"You're depressed?" Joy says.

'And.'

'I also suffer from depression.'

I feel that cycling is starting again - I'm leaving here at some point and need to go back to my real life. This place is not real. This is a facsimile of life, for broken children. I can handle the facsimile, but I can't handle the real thing. I'll have to go back to Executive Pre-Professional and deal with teachers and Kristopher and Emmah, because what else do I know? I put everything on that stupid test. What else am I good at?

Nothing, I'm not good at anything.

I get up and go to the nursing station.

"I'm not going to be able to sleep."

"Can't you sleep?" The nurse is a white-haired little old lady with glasses.

"No, I know I'm not going to be able to sleep," I answer. "I'm taking preventive action."

"We have a sedative called Atavan. It is injectable. It will relax you and let you sleep."

"Let's do it," I say, and under Paullie's supervision, on the phone, I sit down and have attached a small needle to what looks like a butterfly clip in my arm. I stare forward when something yellow is pumped into me and then I stumble into my room - stumble because I feel it touches me even when I get up from the chair. It's a kind of powerful muscle relaxant and loving hands pull me down when I fall into bed, but the last thought I have before I go to sleep is:

Great, soldier, now you're depressed and, in the hospital, and a drug addict. And everyone knows it.

Nurse Monieec takes me to the same office where I had been interviewed the day before, to ask me how I adapt. I look at the white walls and the table where she showed me the pain card and think I've come a bit far since yesterday; I ate and slept; you can't deny that. Eating and sleeping will do a body good. I did need the shot.

"How do we feel today?" She asks.

'Fine. Well, I couldn't sleep last night. I had to take a picture.'

"I saw on your map. Why do you think you couldn't sleep?"

"My friends called. They were kind of... making jokes about my whole situation."
"And why would they do that?"

"I don't know."

"Maybe it's not your friends." "Well, I told them... 'Screw you', actually. The most important, Kristopher. I said to him, 'Screw you on.'"

"Did that make you feel good?"

I sigh. "Yes. There was also a girl."

"Who would that be?"

"Emmah. One of my friends."

"What about them?"

"I'm done with her too."

"So you made a lot of big decisions on your first day here."

'And.'

'This happens to boys' children: they come to make big decisions. Sometimes they are good decisions, sometimes they are bad ones.'

"Well, I hope so, of course."

'Me too. What do you think of the decisions?'

I imagine Emmah and Kristopher solving, replaced by Joy and that girl too.

"It was the right thing to do."

'Beautiful. Now you've made new friends here too, haven't you?'

"Sure."

"I saw you talking to Humboldt Koper outside the smoking lounge last night."

"Is that his real name?" I laugh. "Yes, well, you were talking too. We all were.'

'Yes, of course. Now you may not want to be so friendly with your fellow patients on the floor.'

"Why not?"

'That can distract children from the healing process.'

"How?"

"This is a hospital. It's not a place to make friends. Friends are great, but this place is about you and makes you feel better."

'But...' I fidget. "I respect Humble. I respect Joy. After a day and a half, I have more respect for them than for most children ... in the world, really.' 'Be careful about entering into close relationships, Dariez.

Focus on yourself.'

"Okay."

"Only then will healing take place?"

"Okay."

Nurse Monieec leans back with her moon face.

"As you know, we have certain activities on the floor."

"Right."

'On your first day you are exempt from activities, but after that you are expected to do so on a daily basis.'

"Okay."

"That means you start today. This is a chance for you to explore your interests. So I ask you: what are your hobbies?" Bad question, Monieec.

"I don't have one."

"Aha. None at all?"

"No."

I work, Monieec and I think about work, and I worry about work, and I think about how much I think about work, and I worry about how much I think about work, and I think about how crazy I get about how much I think about work. Does that count as a hobby?

"I see it." She takes some notes. "So-oh, we can put you in any activity group." "I think so."

"And you go?"

'Can I play cards with Armelio in the groups?'

"No."

"Will participating in it take me out of here on Thursday?"

"I can't say for sure. But not participating is seen as a step back in the healing process.'

"Okay. Sign me up.'

Nurse Monieec marks a sheet in her lap. "Your first activity is crafting tonight, before dinner, with Lacey in the activity lounge, which is through the doors behind the nursing station."

"I thought those doors didn't open."

"We can open them, Dariez."

"When does it start?"

"Seven."

"Whoa. I won't be there exactly at seven o'clock.'

"Why is that?"

"I have to meet someone at seven o'clock."

'A visitor?'

"Sure," I lie.

"A friend?"

"Well, yes. Until now. I hope so.'

At 6:52 p.m.

I position myself at the end of the hall where I met my parents again yesterday and today - around three o'clock, without Sarah this time; she was at a friend's house.

Dad didn't make any jokes and mom brought the shirt for Joy, who shook her hand and told her You girl is amazing and she told him she knew that. Dad asked if we could watch movies... and I told him we did, but that because so ~Sped~ kids were older, they were boring movies with Cary Grant and Greta Garbo and stuff, and he asked if I wouldn't like him to bring oversaw II on DVD.

I contacted Howard and it turned out that the hospital had a DVD player like everyone else in the world and so Dad and I made an appointment for Wednesday night, in three days, when he didn't have to work late. He came over with Blade II and we all watched it.

The place where I sit is the part of the H that reflects the part next to the smoking lounge; Joy said she didn't smoke, so I think she wants to meet up here. I didn't tell my parents about her. I did tell them that I talked to my friends, that things weren't going well, but that they were probably part of the problem anyway and that it was good to stay away from them for a while. Mom said she knew my friends smoked weed and that they probably had a bad influence anyway. Dad said Now you didn't smoke weed, did you, Dariez? And I told him no, no I hadn't, not for the SATs as he told me. And we all laughed.

They asked how I ate and I told them I was eating fine, which was true.

They asked how I slept and I told them I slept well, which I hoped would be true tonight.

Now I'm sitting with my legs crossed, only I think that looks weird, so I loosen them, only now I'm cold and nervous, so I cross them again. Exactly at 19:00 Joy, in the

same clothes as I saw her yesterday, dark Capri pants and a white woman beater, comes down the hallway.

She sits down next to me in the chair and moves the hair off her face with little fingers without nail polish on them.

"You've come," she says.

"Well, you gave me a note. That's like the first time a girl gave me a note.' I smile, I try to sit up straight and look good in my chair.

"We're going to make this fast," she says. "And it's going to be a game." "Five minutes, right?"

"Right, here's the game: it's just being questioned. I ask you a question and you ask me a question."

"Okay. Do you have to answer?"

"If you want, you can answer. But whatever happens, you have to end up with another question.' 'So we are exchanging questions. Like twenty questions. Why do we have to talk like that?"

"It's the best way to get to know someone. And in five minutes we can do much more than twenty questions. If we don't.

"I'll start. Ready?"

I'm concentrating. "Yes." "No, answer with a question. Don't tell me you're stupid. Are you stupid?"

"No!" I shake my head. "Uh ... are you ready?"

"There you go. We're up. First question: Do you think I look dirty?"

Gosh, she immediately gives chase. I took her over. I'm a little embarrassed about how I do it because I look at her from the bottom up like I would if she were on the internet. I look at her feet ending in simple black sneakers and her little ankles and her pale lower legs and the notch in the Capri pants where the pants begin, below her knee, and her body up to her small waist and then the sharp bulge of her breasts and then her neck, which comes through the uneven, swollen neckline of her wife-beater, and her small chin and lips. The cuts on her face line her cheeks and forehead: small parallel slashes, three together in each place, with lumps of white skin at the ends where they heal. They don't look like very deep cuts, and they're thin — I feel like when they heal, they look fine. And she's beautiful. No way. Her eyes are green and knowing.

"No, you look great," I say.

"What's your question?"

"Uh, why did you give me the note?"

"I thought you were interesting. Why did you do what it said?"

'Me...' I can't think of a fake answer fast enough. "I'm a straight guy, you know. So when a girl talks to me or whatever, I do exactly what she says. Wait, now: make it a compliment.

'Especially if it's a beautiful girl.' I smile.

"You're not very good at this game. What is your question?"

"Oh, right. Ah... are you straight?"

She sighs. 'Yes, of course. Don't get too excited. You don't have a boner, do you?'

"No! "I cross my legs. "No. So... how do you get here?"

"Oh, that's a big one. Over the line. What do you think?"

"Someone came up to you while you were cutting your face?"

'Ding- ding- ding! In retrospect, actually. I was bleeding all over the sink. How do you get here?'

"I checked myself in. When did you come here?"

"Why did you check yourself in? Twenty-one days ago. Oops. Turn it around. Pretend I ended with the question.' She rubs her arms.

"I wasn't doing well. I called, you know, the Suicide Hotline, and they told me to come here. Why have you been here for so long?"

"They're not sure I won't hurt myself again. What medication do you use?"
"Zoloft. What about you?"

"Paxil, where do you live?"

"Around here... Where do you live?"

"Knox, what are your parents doing?"

'My mother designs greeting cards and my father works in health insurance. What about you?'

"My mother is a lawyer and my father is dead. Do you want to know how he died?"

"I'm sorry. How? Do I want to know?"

"Those are two questions. Yes, you do. He died while fishing. He fell off a boat. Isn't that the stupidest thing you've ever heard?"

"No. Not by a long shot," I say. "Do you want to know what I think is the stupidest way to die?"

"What?"

'Auto-erotic suffocation. Do you know what that is?'

"If kids put ropes around them while they're jerking, right?"

'Right, I read about it in the DSM. Have you ever read the DSM?'

'The great book of mental disorders?'

'And!'

"Of course. Have you ever heard of Undine's Curse?"

"Oh my God! I thought I was the only one who knew that. Where you forget how to breathe. Uh... where did you first see the DSM?"

"On the bookshelf of my shrinkage, You?"

"Same thing. You also call them 'shrinking'?"

"They are, aren't they?"

"What does that actually mean?"

'I think 'head shrinks', because they shrink children's heads. Do you think I have all the answers?'.

I'll stop. I need a break. I put my hands on my knees and swing forward. This game is difficult. "Is your name Joy?"

"Why wouldn't that be the case?"

"After the whole lunch yesterday, I don't know what to believe. Do you know my name?" "Of course. Dariez Gilner.

Do you think I'm one?"

"How would you know my last name?"

"I've read your bracelet. Do you want to read mine?"

"Joy Hinton.' Hey...' I'm like, "So here's one: did you know what was going to happen at lunch yesterday?"

'With 'Beth'? Of course. He does that to everyone.

What I'm curious about is this: why would you come by?' "I thought she-uh, he was, Yes, you know, a girl. And I was asked-'

'Why did you come here?'"

"Wait, I forgot to ask you a question."

'That's okay. You have one point. Why would you come here?'

"Um, I thought I was saying, because you're a girl. And you asked me. And you seem cool?' You mentioned she's beautiful; now show that you are not superficial and say that she is cool.

'It's hilarious to see how you try to answer these questions properly. You're a stupid guy. You know you're stupid, right?'

Joy leans back and stretches. Her hair falls off her face and her cuts scream up into the light. The lines of her womanbeater echo her hair.

"Do you know that those cuts to your face aren't that bad?"

"How long have I been here, Dariez?"

"You told me twenty-one days. Is that so?"

"Yes. Can you imagine what they looked like when I walked in?"

"Are they going to scar?"

'I have to have surgery to clean them up. Do you think I should do that?'

"No. Why would you hide what you've been through?"

"I don't know if that's a question. It's too obvious. Wouldn't I be happier without scars?" "I don't know. It's hard to say what would make you happy. I thought I'd be happier at a very tough high school, and I ended up here. Wait, where do you go to school?"

"Delfin." That's a private school in Knox; I think it's the last one where they have to wear uniforms. "You?"

'Executive Pre-Professional. Do you have to wear uniforms?'

"Are you like a school uniform pervert?"

"No. Good... nah.'

"Two points. You didn't ask a question. Do you like this game?"

"I love talking to you. It's like a mathematical problem. Do you like to talk to me?"

"It's all good. Do you like math?"

"I thought I was good at it, but it turns out that I'm a year behind everyone else. You?"

"I'm bad at school. I spend most of my time in ballet. But I'm not long enough for that. Have you ever been long enough for something?"

'Maybe some rides, when I was a small child. Why?'

"I'm still too short for those rides. It's to be brief.

Remember that.' She stops.

"One point for you."

'That's three for you. Game over.'

"Okay, cool." I lean back in my chair. "Phew. What now?"

'That's a good question. I don't have a clue. I have to start crafting.'

"Me too."

"Do you want to go together?"

"Sure." I'll stop. That's a come-on, isn't it? "Can we... uh... can I kiss you or whatever?"

Joy leans back and laughs and laughs. "No, you can't kiss me!

What, you think we'll play the game once and you can kiss me?" "Well, I thought we had something to do."

"Dariez." She leans forward and looks me straight in the eye. "No." She smiles. The cuts crease.

"Do you know when you're leaving?" I ask.

"Thursday."

My heart jumps. "Me too." I start leaning forward, "No. No, Dariez. Crafting."

"Okay." I get up. I put my hand out for Joy. She ignores it.

"Are you racing!" she says, sprinting down the hall into the activity lounge, as I follow, trying to keep up, how can't I, when my legs are so much longer? Does ballet teach you to run? Howard yells at us as we pass the nursing station - "Kids! Children!

Don't run on the ground!' -but I don't care.

"So, who likes to draw aww here?" asks Lacey. Lacey is a big smiling lady with lots of make-up and bracelets. She rules the activity lounge, which looks exactly like the art room I had when I was in kindergarten. There are patient-contributed paintings of hamburgers and dogs...

... And kites on the walls and then there are posters: OBSTACLES ARE THOSE TERRIFYING THINGS THAT APPEAR WHEN WE TAKE OUR THOUGHTS AWAY FROM OUR GOALS; DREAMS ARE JUST DREAMS UNTIL YOU WAKE UP AND MAKE THEM A REALITY; THINGS I NEED TO DO TODAY: 1) INHALE 2) EXHALE.

Fortunately, the alphabet is nowhere to be seen; if I saw Aa Bb, I would probably start cycling again. There is one interesting poster: CHILDREN WITH MENTAL ILLNESS CONTRIBUTE TO OUR WORLD. It mentions: Abraham Lincoln, Ernest Hemingway, Winston Churchill, Isaac Newton, Sylvia Plath and a bunch of other smart kids who were a little crazy.

It's depressing though. I mean, this room is what I expect a psychiatric hospital to look like. Adults are reduced to children, sitting with finger paint; a cheerful supervisor who tells them that everything they do is great. But isn't this what I asked for when I was filling out my menus?

Part: 13

You wanted kindergarten, soldier, you went to kindergarten.

I wanted the comfort of kindergarten, not the atmosphere.

You have to take the good with the bad. Like your little chick here. I bet you didn't think you'd come in here and find such a nice filly.

Well, she's not a filly.

I have a feeling filly means girlfriend. I look at Joy.

We're trying to decide where to sit. I only talked to her once.

She loves you, boy, and if you can't tell, you won't be able to distinguish a gun from a cap gun in this war.

What kind of war is that again?

The one you fight with your head. Right, how are we doing?

You make a profit, soldier, don't you see that? Joy and I are with Humble and the Professor. "I see that you've gotten to know each other," humble says.

"Leave them alone," says the professor.

"Where were you?" Humble continues. "Were you sitting in a tree, KISSING?"

"No."

"Nothing happens," joy says.

"We're just sitting together," I say. "Dariez and Noelle, sitting in a tree-" He gets up and puts his hands on his hips, sashaying.

"Wait a minute, what's going on here?" Lacey comes along. "Is there a problem, Mr. Koper?"

"No, what? What are you talking about?" He holds up his hands, sits down. "You mean me?"

Lacey scoffs and announces, "This is free-period art recreational therapy, for all of you latecomers!" Humbly points to me and Joy, and is a little ashamed of your gesture. "That means you can draw whatever you feel like. It's a great opportunity to explore your creativity and find out what you like to do for relaxation! Free time is very important!"

Lacey comes up behind me when she finishes announcing:

"You're new. Hello, my name is Lacey. I'm the recreation director.'

'Dariez', I shake her hand.

"Do you want pencil and paper, Dariez?"

"No, I have nothing to do. I can't draw.' 'Sure, you can. It doesn't have to be representative. You can do the abstract. Do you want crayons?'

"No." God, it's so embarrassing. Be asked if you want crayons.

"What about paint?"

"I told you, I can't sign."

'Paint is to paint, not to draw.'

"Well, I can't do that either."

"What about markers?"

"No."

"Anyone?" Lacey turns to the room. 'Our new guest, Dariez, has what we call an artistic block. He has nothing to draw!'

'That's a shame, buddy!' Armelio screams from his table. "Do you want cards?"

"Armelio, no cards here. Can anyone give Dariez something he can draw?"

'Fish!' Joy cries out. "Fish are easy."

'Pills', says Joy.

"Joy," Lacey admonishes. "We don't draw pills." "Salad," says Ebony.

"She wants you to draw it, but she certainly can't eat it," Humble grumbles.

"Mr. Koper! That's it. Leave the room.' "Oh-h," everyone says.

'That's right!' Ebony calls. She makes the referee's gesture. "You're out of here!" "Fine," Humble says. "Whatever. Blame me. Blame the boy who has total respect for everyone else." He gathers his things, which is nothing, and steps out of the activity lounge. "You're all a bunch of yuppies!"

I see him go.

"You can draw a cat!" says the boy, who is afraid of gravity. "I used to have one. It died.'

"Rolling pin," says the bearded boy. These are the first words I've heard him say since I saw him in the dining room on his way in. He still rocks and he still walks the hallways when he's not taken to a room.

"What was that, Robert?" asks Lacey. "That's very good."

What did you say?'

But he clings. He won't say it again. Rolling pin. I wonder what that means for him. If I had one thing to say, I don't think it would be a rolling pin. It would probably be sex.

Of Verschueren...

"He can get something out of his youth," Joy says next to me.

"Oh, there's a good one. Joy, do you want to speak out?"

She sighs and then announces to the room, "Dariez can get something out of his youth."

"That's right," Lacey nods. "Dariez, do you like any of these suggestions?"

But I'm already gone. I started the river at the top of the page, looking down to meet a second river. No, wait, you have to go into the roads first, because the bridges go over the water, remember? First highways, then rivers, the streets. It all comes back to me. How long has it been since I've done this? Since I was nine? How could I forget? I cut a highway through the middle of the page and let him meet another in a beautiful spaghetti exchange. A ramp goes from the intersection through a park and ends in a circle, a nice bustle of residential activity. The blocks start from there. The map forms.

My city...

"Oh, someone has unblocked Dariez's mind!" Lacey announces from the other side of the room. I look back. Ebony, who has been sitting there, goes through the arduous process of getting up with her stick and walks towards me. "I want to see it."

"Huh, thank you Ebony," I say, as I go back to the map. She looks over my shoulder. "Oo-oh that's beautiful," she says.

"What is it?" Armelio screams.

"Let's not scream across the room," Lacey says.

'That's special', says the professor next to me.

"I earn half a credit," Joy says, sketching a flower to my right. She looks at me through the sides of her eyes. "You know I do."

"You do," I say to her, taking a break to look at her. I'm going back to the map. It flows out of me. "Is that someone's brain?" asks Ebony.

I look up at her, roll her mouth and smile down. I look at the map. It's clearly not a brain; it's a map; can't she see the rivers and highways and junctions? But I see how it could look like a brain, as if all roads are twisted neurons, pulling your emotions from one place to another, bringing the city to life. A working brain is probably a lot like a map, where anyone can get from one place to another on the highways. It's the non-working brain that gets blocked, that has dead ends, that's under construction like mine.

"Yes," I say, nodding at her. "Yes. That's exactly what it is. It's a brain.' And I put my card in the middle - this was always a problem for me, finishing the damn stuff; I always ran out of energy before I got to the edge of the page and drew around it. I placed a nose and two paired notches for lips and a neck that ran down. I draw the head so that exactly where the brain would be, this blob of city map is. I make a traffic circle and bring down boulevards to lead to the mouth, and Ebony giggles above me tapping her stick.

'It's so beautiful!'

"It's going to be okay," I say, looking down. I decide it's done. I can do better. I put my initials in the bottom CG as 'computer-generated' - and put the photo aside. I ask for more paper and start the next one.

It's easy and beautiful and I can do it. I can make these things forever. For the rest of the crafts I make five.

I get so focused that I don't even notice when

Joy leaves. I find only her note, sitting next to me, decorated with a flower, collecting my things from the room.

IM TAKING A BREAK FROM YOU. CAN'T GET TOO ATTACHED. THE NEXT MEETING IS TUESDAY, THE SAME TIMES AND PLACE. DON'T WORRY ABOUT WAITING THAT LONG. I LIKE YOU.

I fold the note and put it in my pocket next to the other. After the crafting is dinner, where Humble tells me he forgives me for getting him in trouble, and I thank him, and after dinner it's playing cards with Armelio, who tells me that now that I have a little experience under my belt, I might be ready for the big card tournament they have tomorrow night.

"Are you playing with real money?" I ask.

'No, buddy! We play with buttons!'

I hang out of the lounge during the cigarette break - I just follow the group; wherever they go, I'm going to talk to Joy about my day. Then I go into my room with my card/brain art. My bed isn't made up during the day, they don't pamper you in Six North — but the pillow has returned to its normal shape, no longer dented by my sweaty head, and when I lie down, it lets the air out in the slowest, soothing hiss I've ever heard.

"Do you feel better?" asks Joy.

"Quite a bit," I say. 'You have to leave the room more, Joy. There's a whole world.' "I pray every day that one day I will get better like you."

"I'm not much better, boy."

But I'm good enough to sleep. No shot needed.

The next day is Monday and I should be at school.

I shouldn't have to eat with Humble and hear what his girlfriend did to him every day: they passed a Burger King. I should be at school. I shouldn't have to explain to Ebony's friend on the phone that what I drew was a map of her brain and had her echo "He's so good, Marlene, she's so good." I should be at school.

I shouldn't put my Zolof in line behind Joy, who is dressed in my shirt for his interview. I should be at school.

I pluck up the courage to go to the phones at 11 a.m.

and check the messages. "Hey, Dariez, it's Kristopher, listen, I'm sorry, boy.

The truth is that I probably - well, I got into a big fight with Emmah after you told me she was taking pills and... I think I might have some of those depression things too. Lately I've been like, sometimes unable to get out of bed and I'm just... yah' know, really sleepy and I lose my train of thought. I probably called you the other day because I was projecting, that's what Emmah says, and I'm seriously interested in visiting you. Me and Emmah have problems.'

I call him back and leave a message for him. I tell him that if he feels depressed, he should first go to his GP and get a referral to psychopharmacology and go through the process like I did. I tell him it's nothing to be ashamed of. I tell him I'm glad he called, but I don't know if he should come over because I'm sorting out my stuff here and I think I want to keep here and the outside world as separate as possible. And I ask him what's going on between him and Emmah, if they made it up yet.

'Hello, Dariez, this is Mr. Reynolds again-'

I call him back and leave a message that I am in the hospital for personal reasons and that he will have his labs if I am good and ready to do them. I tell him that I will provide all documentation from doctors — including paranormal pharmacologists, psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses, recreation directors and President Armelio — that I am now being cared for in a facility where the stress of doing labs is not allowed. And I tell him that if he wants to talk to me again, he can call the number here and shouldn't be alarmed if someone answers, "Jack's Pub."

"Hey, Dariez, this is Jenna, I'm one of Emmah's friends, and like... okay, this is embarrassing, but do you want to spend time soon? I heard about all these things you went through like you were in the hospital or whatever, and my last friend was insensitive to those things because I'm experiencing that a little bit too? And so I thought you'd probably understand me, and I always thought you were cute — we met a few... but I always thought you were so shy that you wouldn't be fun to hang out with; I didn't realize you were depressed.'

-In-

"I think that's brave of you to admit it and I just think we should hang around."

Good. I call Jenna back and leave her a message that I might be able to hang out with her next week.

That's it, the other posts are from Richard and Scruggs and they're about weed and I ignore them. I put the phone down without hitting it on my finger.

Joy is right in front of me.

'I follow your advice. Come out of the room.'

"Hey, good morning! How are you?"

He shrugs. "Okay. What is there to do?"

"There is a lot to do. Do you like drawing?"

'Eh.'

"Do you like to play cards?"

'Eh.'

'Do you like to... listen to music?'

"Yes." 'Great! Okay-'

'Only Italy music.'

"Huh." I'm trying to figure out where to get Italian music, or even what it's called when suddenly Solomon flops by in his sandals.

"Excuse me if you want, I'm trying to rest!" he shouts at us. Joy looks at him and curls his face into a smile, his glasses above his nose.

"What is the problem?" asks Solomon.

'Seventeen days!' Joy says. "For seventeen days the Jew does not want to talk to me! And now he's doing that. I'm honored.'

"I didn't talk to you, I talked to him," Solomon points to me.

"Have you met?" I ask.

Joy and Solomon shake hands - Solomon's pants fall a little, but he bends his legs to hold them up. Then he takes his hand back and stalks off. Joy turns to me: 'I think this is enough for one day.' And he goes back to our room.

I shake my head.

The phone rings next to me. I plead for Armelio. He picks up, picks up the receiver, says 'Jack's Pub' and gives me the phone.

"Me?"

"Yes, buddy."

I pick up the phone. "I'm looking for Dariez Gilner," says an authoritative voice through the line.

"Ah, speaking. Who is this?"

"This is Mr. Alfred Janowitz, Dariez. I am your client at

Executive Pre-Professional Hoog?"

'Holy crap!' I say, and I hang up.

The phone starts ringing again. I stand by it and ignore it, explain to armelio and all the others who pass by that it's for me, but that I can't answer. They totally understand. It is the client. I was right. I've seen this guy before; he is the one who greeted us on that first day when I was high with Kristopher and told us that only the best was accepted and

only the best would be rewarded. He's the one who comes by the classes and looks at us as we make tests and hand out chocolates like that makes up for it. He's the one who says 'your school day shouldn't end before five o'clock' and is always in the newspaper as the most no-nonsense director there is and now he's sitting on my ass because he knows I'm crazy and knows I haven't done my homework. I should never have left that message for Mr. Reynolds. This is it. I'm being evicted. I'm out of school. I never go to high school again. I never go to college.

When the phone finally dies, I start pacing.

I was right all along. What was I thinking? You add up your little victories here and think they count for something. You'll be lulled to sleep by thinking that Six North is the real world. You make friends and have a succinct conversation with a girl, and you think you've succeeded, Dariez? You didn't succeed at all. You didn't win anything. You haven't proven anything. You haven't gotten better. You didn't get a job. You don't make any money. You're here to cost the state money, take the same pills you took before. You're wasting your parents' and taxpayers' money. You have nothing wrong with you.

This was all an excuse, I think. I was doing well. I had an average of 93 and I kept my head above water. I had good friends and a loving family. And because I had to be the center of attention, because I needed something more, I ended up here, wallowing in myself, trying to convince everyone around me that I was kind of... ill.

I don't have a disease. I keep pacing. Depression is not a disease. It's a pretext to be a prima donna. Everyone knows that. My friends know; my director knows. The sweating has started again. I feel cycling roaring in my brain. I didn't do anything right. What did I do, take a lot of little pictures? That doesn't count as anything. I'm done. My director just called me and I hung up on him and didn't call back.

I'm done. I'm being evicted. I'm done.

The boy is back in my belly and I hurry to my bathroom, but something about me won't let it go. I bend over the toilet moaning and chopping, but it doesn't come so I wash my mouth out and get into bed.

"What happened?" asks Joy. "You never sleep during the day."

"I'm in big trouble," I say, and I lie there, getting up to have lunch until Dr. Ross comes over at three o'clock and sticks her head in my room.

"Dariez? I'm here to talk."

"I'm very happy to see you." We are back in the room where Nurse Monieec checks me. Dr. Ross seems very familiar with it.

"I'm also happy to see you. I'm glad to see you well," she says.

"Yes, it's been a roller coaster, I have to say."

'An emotional roller coaster.'

'And.'

"Where's that roller coaster now, Dariez?"

"Down. All the way down.'

"What's got you down?"

'I got a call from my headmaster.'

"And what did he want?"

"I don't know. I hung up.'

"What do you think he wanted, Dariez?"

"To turn me off."

"And why would he want to do that?"

"Hello? Because I'm here? Because I'm not in school?" 'Dariez, your director can't deport you because you're in a psychiatric hospital.'

"Well, you know all my other problems."

"What are they?"

'Hanging out with my friends all the time- getting depressed, not doing homework...'

"Uh-huh. Let's put that off for a moment, Dariez. I haven't seen you since Friday. Can you tell us a bit about how you got here?"

I give her the rap. There's a lot more to add now, about being at Six North. About Joy and the food and not vomiting and sleeping, where I am one by two.

"How does it compare to Friday, Dariez?"

'Better. Much, much better. But the question is, am I better, or am I just lulled to sleep in a false sense of security by this fake environment? I mean, it's not normal here.'

"Nowhere is normal, Dariez."

"I don't think so. What's the news since I've been here?"

"Someone was trying to gas the Four Seasons in Knox." 'Jeez!'

"I know," Dr. Ross grins. Then she leans in. "Dariez, there's one thing you didn't mention that your recreation director did say. She said you did art while you've been here.

"Oh yes, that's nothing. Just yesterday.'

"What's it like?"

"Well, remember last time I told you the joy: that I liked to draw cards when I was a little kid? That's kind of where it came from.'

'Why?'

"When they gave me a pencil and paper in arts and crafts, I remembered - well, I didn't remember, I was inspired by Joy -

"That's the girl you met?"

"Right."

'The way you describe her shows a real friendship.'

"Oh, forget a friendship. We'll go out when I leave, I think.'

"Do you think you're ready for that, Dariez?"

"Absolutely."

"Okay." She makes a note. "So how did Joy help you?"

"She suggested that I draw something from my childhood, and that made me remember the cards."

"I see it."

'And I started drawing one, but then Ebony came over-'

"You're on a first name basis with all those kids."

"Of course."

"Have you ever considered yourself good at making friends,

Dariez?'

'Don't!'

"But you can make friends here."

"Right... Well, this is different.'

"How else is it?"

"It's, I don't know... there is no pressure.'

"No pressure to make friends?"

"No, no pressure to work hard."

'As in the outside world.'

"Right."

'Enormous pressure out there. Your Tentacles.'

'And.'

"Are there tentacles in here, Dariez?"

I stand still and think. The way they run things on Six North has become clear to me: it's about keeping kids busy and passing on the joy of time. You wake up and you immediately have a blood pressure monitor on your arm and someone who takes your wrist. Then it's breakfast. Then you get your medication and then there's a smoke break, and then you maybe have fifteen minutes to yourself before there's any kind of activity. That leads to lunch which leads to more medication and more smoking and more activities, and then suddenly the day is over; it's TIME - for dinner, and everyone swaps salt and desserts, and then it's the 10 PM cigarette break and bedtime-.

'No, there are no Tentacles in here', I say. "The opposite of a Tentacle is a simple task, something that you are presented with and that you do without question.

That's what they have in them here.'

"Right. Your only Tentacles here are your phone calls, which just got you down.'

"That's right."

Dr. Ross takes notes. "Now, here's an important question,

Dariez. Are there Anchors in here?'

'Huh.'

"Everything you can hold."

I think about it. If an Anchor is a constant, there are many of them. There's the constant lite FM, which occasionally borders on dangerously funky, coming out of the nursing station or Paullie or Howard behind it. There's the constant schedule: the food that comes and goes, the medications that are handed out, Armelio's announcements. There is the constant of Armelio himself, always ready to play cards. And My-a Joy is always around and goes, "It's coming to Ya!"

'The children are Anchors', I say.

"However, children don't make good Anchors, Dariez. They change. The kids here are going to change. The patients leave. You can't rely on it.'

"When are they leaving?"

"I can't know."

"What about the staff?"

"They also change, just on a different Joy scale. Children always come and go.'

"Joy. She is beautiful and smart and I like her. She could be an Anchor.'

"You don't want any of your anchors to be a member of the opposite sex that you're attracted to," Says Dr. Ross. 'Relationships change even more than children. It's like two kids changing clothes. It's exponentially more volatile. Especially two teenagers.'

"But Romeo and Juliet were teenagers," I point out.

"And what happened to Romeo and Juliet?"

"Oh," I mutter. "Right."

"And have we moved on, Dariez? Have we gone beyond thinking about those thoughts?" "Yes," I nod.

"Because when you have those thoughts again, you know you have to come back here."

"I know. I don't do that.'

"Why not?"

"It's just... It would be to kill myself. I would hurt many children and

... It would be.'

"That's right," Dr. Ross leans over the table. "It would be. And not just for other children. For you." "It's not noble or anything," I say. "Like this boy Joy, who is my roommate, he is practically dead. He does nothing. He just lies in bed all day."

"Right."

"And I never want to be like him. I don't want to live like that. And if I were dead, I would live like this."

"Excellent, Dariez."

She stops. As I said, the good shrink knows when to throw in a dramatic pause.

I tap my feet. The fluorescent lights hum.

"I want to pick up your Ankers again," says Dr. Ross. "Can you think of anything else you've found here that can take up your time when you leave?" I think. I know there is something. It's on the tip of my brain tongue. But it won't happen.

"No."

"Okay, no problem. You've made a lot of progress today."

We only have to do one thing: call your client.'

"No!" I tell her, but she pulls out her mobile phone, which is allowed here. "Yes, I would like the number for Executive Pre-Professional High School in Knox."

'You can't you can't you can't' I say, leaning over the table, reaching for the phone. Fortunately, the blinds are drawn so that no one can look inside here; if they did, they would probably have me sedated. She gets up and walks to the door, points out. Do I want certainty here? I sit down again.

"Yes," she says. 'I have to speak to the director. I call one of your students back to one of your students about a health and legal issue. I am the mother.' A break.

"Great." She picks up the phone. "I'm connected." "I can't believe you're doing this," I say.

"I can't believe you'd be worried if I did this... Yes, hello? Is this sir..." she looks at me.

"Janowitz," I say.

'Janowitz?'

I hear an affirmative mumph through the line. 'I'm Dr. Ross, who calls your student Dariez Gilner. You called him earlier in the mental institution of the UMPC Hospital in Knox. I'm dariez's licensed therapist and I'm here with him; do you want to talk to him?'

She nods. "There you go, Dariez."

I take the cell phone - it's smaller than mine, buzzier. "Eh, hello?"

"Dariez, why hang me?" His thumping voice is light and gentle, almost smiling.

"Ah... I thought I was in trouble. I thought I was being evicted. You called me in the hospital.'

"Dariez, I called you because I got a message from one of our teachers. I just wanted to tell you that you have the full support of the school in everything you go through and that we are more than willing to repeat your semester, or give it in the summer, or to provide work for you where you are now if you would miss enough days to justify it."

'Oh.'

"We don't judge our students because they're in the hospital, my goodness, Dariez."

"No? But it's, just like, a psychiatric-'

'I know what kind of hospital it is. Do you think we don't have other children in these situations? It's a common problem in young children.'

"Whoa. Uh, thank you.'

"Are you okay?"

"I'm doing better."

"Do you know when you're leaving?"

I don't want to tell him on Thursday and then let it be Friday.

Or next Thursday. Or next year.

"Soon," I say.

"Okay. You just stay in it and when you come back, we'll be waiting for you at Executive Pre-Professional.' "Thank you, Mr. Janowitz." And I see it in my head: I'm going back to school. My small group of friends, only they're not even my friends

anymore who are offered by this new collection of girls who like me because I'm depressed and teachers who empathize and the suddenly nice principal. It's something I want to get excited about. But I can't.

"Look, was that so bad?" asks Dr. Ross. And I have to admit that it wasn't. But it was a bit like being told that the prison is glad you got a reprieve, but we'll be here with open arms to take you in when you come back.

"The plan right now is to fire you on Thursday, Dariez, and I'll be here to talk to you on Wednesday, okay?" asks Dr. Ross. I shake her hand and thank her. I tell her what I tell her when I feel really good about talking to her, which is that she knows how to do her job. Then I go back to my room and draw some brain maps.

I'm looking forward to tonight, to Armelio's big card tournament.

"Okay!" says Armelio. "Everyone here?"

We are back in the activity lounge. Joy, Humble, Ebony and the Professor are here. Everyone shaved today - it turns out that the shaving rule is enforced only on weekdays - and they look ten times better. Even Rolling Pin Robert, pacing the halls outside, looks subservient. I have to remember that: shaving can make even a mental patient look good.

"Huh." Joy exudes. "Joy is still in his interview." "Yes," says Ebony. "Dariez lent him a shirt. You're so nice, Dariez."

"Thank you."

"When are you going to do more of your art?"

"Maybe tonight, after playing cards."

"That's right, buddy, cards are what we need to focus on," Armelio announces. He stands at the head of the table, which is covered with paint drops, chalk marks and ink stains over uneven wood. In the middle is a plastic container with the buttons, separated into four even partitions. It seems that at some point the buttons were ordered by size or color, but now they have all been mixed up in every conceivable shade, shape and decoration.

They look like jewels.

"I don't want any of my buttons missing at the end!" Lacey says from behind. She sits at the other table, reads a Roboyce novel and accompanies.

"That's right, we're still looking for the Blue Button Bandit," humble says.
'Anyone who can suddenly hold up their pants, we are going to be very suspicious of that. Beware of Solomon, that is. And Ebony.'

"I once told you, stupid, to stop talking about my pants." "Okay, everyone ready?" asks Armelio. "Take your knots!"

Our hands dive into the middle of the table and grab fists. We pour out the knots in front of us and use our fingertips to spread them in a one-bud thick layer. Armelio can judge whether we have an equal amount.

'Humbly put back six buttons. Ebony, put back ten. Joy, what's going on, buddy? You also have about two hundred buttons ~Sped~!'

"I got a button bonus," joy says, and just then Joy enters the activity room.

He moves with his normal loping gait, leaning back with my shirt on. He stops at the end of our table, makes sure he has our attention, raises his right hand, shakes him in the air as if he were doing a magic trick, and then bangs both his fists on the table so that his arms make a "V-shape," as if he were chairman of the board of directors. He grins:

"I get it."

Silence holds the room.

Lacey starts clapping from behind, slowly, but with reverence and purpose. Then Armelio joins in and the pace begins to spiral.

"Okay!"

'Congratulations!'

'Hooray for Knox scumbags!'

'Joy-by! Joy-by!'

In a small room, eight children clapping can be a lot. The posters seem to shake with applause. As it gets louder, there is crying and honking and cheering. Tommy gets up and gives Joy a bear hug, the kind you can see between two men who have known each other for twenty years, who have been Fiend One and Fiend Two, for whom the victory of one is just as important for the other.

'Joy, buddy, you the boy!' Armelio walks over to the cuddly couple and hits Joy's back, almost falling over me.

"Wait a minute," joy says. He pulls himself out of the hug and holds up his right hand. "Before we get too crazy, 'because I see that the buttons are out, I have to thank this guy here.' He walks up to me. "This boy gave me the shirt of his back, this blue one here and he didn't know me from Adam, and there's no doubt, without him I wouldn't have gotten this home. This new house.'

I get up and Joy hugs me, wrapping his big bony hands around my back, and I feel the smooth old skin of his cheek and the well-knitted fabric of my shirt doing better with him than ever with me. I think about how much this means to this guy; about how much more important it is than going to a high school or coming with a girl or being friends with someone. This boy just got a place to live. Me? I have one. I will always have one. I have no reason to worry about it. My stupid fantasies about becoming homeless are just that, the fact is that my parents will take me in time, wherever they are. But some children must be lucky to live. And I never knew I could make someone lucky.

If Joy can get a place to live, I think, then I can get a life worth living.

"Thank you, boy," joy says.

"It's nothing," I mutter. "Thanks for the tour." "Okay, guys, we're going to play cards or something?" Armelio asks, but Joy stops him.

"One more thing: I'm sorry, Dariez, but I accidentally fell into something on the way back from the interview." He turns around. There is a... Hang on...

There's a giant piece of in the back of my shirt, right above his leash.

'Ah...' I can't believe I didn't smell it. Did I touch it when I hugged him? "Ah, Joy... it's okay... my mother can wash it out-'

"It's not real!" Joy reaches back and pulls it off, throws it at me. It bounces off my shirt (a tie-dye T-shirt that everyone on Six North likes) and ends up on the table in the buttons.

'It's plastic! I've had it since the eighties! Ha! I love it!'

Armelio cracks. 'Holy crap! Look at that! It looks like something my mother would leave in my bedroom!' Everyone stops, turns.

"President Armelio, we didn't need to know that," humble says.

"Your mother pooped in your bedroom?" The professor asks.

"Who said that?" asks Armelio. 'I was talking about plastic, what's wrong with you?'

"Everyone just cools it down a little bit," Lacey says, as she gets up with her book by her side. "Let's have fun, but stay calm."

"Okay, who gets the doodie button?" Humbly holds up the poop. "I think it counts for two."

Joy sits down and we ante up. The game is poker, seven-card stud. I'm not good at it. The hands start and children start betting crazy and throw in three or four buttons in the beginning. I can't match them. I have a limited number. And I don't seem to get good hands. So-o I fold. I fold three times in a row.

The third time Joy says, "You might as well bet. They're just buttons.'

"Yes," humble says. "Let me show you a secret." He reaches into the button container and takes out a handful.

"See?"

"I see it," Armelio says, looking over his cards. "Don't think that's not cheating, Humble. Even more and you're out.'

I smile and put in six buttons.

"Where exactly am I from?" Humble asks Armelio. "The jackpot button?"

"Be nice," says the Professor.

"Oh, listen to her," Humble jerks on his thumb. "Trying to be the mediator." He leans inside me. "Don't be fooled by her grandmother.

She's a real hustler.'

"Excuse me?" The Professor lays down her cards. "What do you mean, 'grandma?'"

"Nothing, you just have that little old granny look around you, to appease children in your trap to play good cards!" Humble gestures to themselves incredulous.

"You say I'm old."

"Not me! I'm saying you're a grandmother!"

"Humble, apologies," Lacey says from behind.

"Why? Grandmas are wonderful things.'

"For your information, I'll let you know," says the professor, "that unlike certain kids around here, I'm my age."

"Oh, so now I'm a liar?" Humble asks, standing.

'We all know that's what you are', says the professor.

'People...' Lacey warns.

"If I'm a liar, do you know what you are?"

"What? You better not call me old, because then I'll take this stick and hit you in the head right in front of everyone's eyes.'

"You don't take anything from me!" Ebony keeps her stick closed. Quietly, she has far away from most buttons.

"You're a yuppie!" Humbly screams and he picks up the dog doo and throws it at her head. 'A stupid yuppie with no respect for anyone!'

'A-agh!' The professor holds her face. "He broke it! He broke my nose!". The dog has jumped across the room and Lacey jumps over it slightly as she makes a hasty retreat.

'Uh-oh', says Armelio. "Now you've done it. We had such a good card game.'

Harold enters the room with two big boys in light blue jumpsuits, Lacey behind him. Humbly raises his hands. "What? I didn't do it!'

"C'mon, Mr. Koper," harold says.

"I can't believe it!" Humble says. "She insulted me! It wasn't even my dog poop! I didn't have the weapon!".

He begins to point to Joy. "He's an accomplice. If I go, he goes.'

"Humbly, you have three seconds to get here." "Okay, okay." Humbly throws his cards down. "You guys have fun with your buttons." He is escorted outside by Harold and the security guards and receives a thunderous blow to the Professor's ass. She still has one hand on her face and claims to be bleeding, but when she removes her hand, there is no marking of any kind.

Lacey sits down at her table again.

"You've all seen what happened. He attacked me," says the professor.

"Yes, we've seen it, Doomba," armelio says.

'Excuse me?'

"You are the Doomba; we all know you are." "What is a Doomba?" I ask.

"If you ask, you might be a Doomba too!" Armelio looks crazy. This is the first time, I've seen it.

'Huh', Joy breathes.

"Dariez is not a Doomba," says Joy. "He's at the level." "Am I not the winner yet?" asks Ebony.

'How can you have such ~Sped~ buttons?' asks Armelio.

"You don't win hands!"

"It's cuz I don't overbeat," says Ebony, hunched over, and a stream of buttons roars from her top.

'Oops!'

They keep coming - a mountain that runs over the front pile. She starts laughing and laughing and shows us her very neat and clean gums as she cries, "Oh-oh, I got you! I get it, you all!"

"That's it," Armelio says, throwing his cards down. 'Every Monday the card tournament is always thrown into disarray! I'll stop!'

'Are you resigning from your position as chairman?' Joy asks him.

"Forget you, buddy!"

My tongue hurts from so much biting. It may not have been a rules game, but it had just as ~Spied~ emotional ups-and-downs as poker on TV. I clean up with Joy and Lacey.

Tonight, when I get into bed, I'm too busy wondering what a Doomba is, and when Ebony stuck the knots in her breasts, and what that even feels like, and Joy and the fact that I get to see her tomorrow, to do anything but sleep.

Part: 14

The next day Humble is not there for breakfast. I sit with Joy and collect my shirt, perfectly folded, and put it on the back of my chair. I drink the first "Swee-Touch-No" tea of the day and ask what they did with Humble.

"Oh, he's happy. They were going to give him serious drugs, probably.'

"Like what?"

"Do you know drugs? Pills?"

"Sure. I'm a teenager."

"Well, Humble is psychotic and depressed," Joy explains. "So he gets SSRIs, lithium, Xanax-'Vicodin,' joy says. 'Vicodin, Valium... he's like the heaviest medicated boy here.'

"So when they took him away, they gave him all that stuff?"

"No, he normally gets that. If they take him away, they give him shots, I bet. Atavan."

"I had that."

"You do? That will knock you out right away. Was it fun?"

"It was okay. I don't want all that Joy-."

"Huh. That's the right attitude," says Joy. "We've been sidetracked a bit by drugs, me and Joy."

"Yes, not a joke," says Joy. He shakes his head, looks up, chews and folds his hands. 'Sidetracked is not even the word. We were off the face of this planet. We were locked up twenty-four hours a day. I missed so ~Sped~ concerts.'

"I'm sorry-

'-Santana, Zeppelin, what's that later with the junkie, Nirvana ... I saw Rush, Van Halen, Mötley Crüe, everyone. All this when it cost ten dollars to get in. And I was too much of a garbage man to worry about.'

"What is a garbage head?"

'Someone who does everything, whatever', Joy explains. "You give it to me, I would do it. Just to see what it was like."

Jeez. I admit it sounds a bit sexy. I see the call. But maybe that's why I'm here, to meet guys who take away the call.

"Do you think Humble stages scenes so he can get drugs?" I now spread cream cheese on a bagel. I started ordering bagels x2 for breakfast; they are far away from the best option.

"That's the kind of thing you just can't speculate about," Joy says.

"Oh, here comes your girl."

She rushes in with a tray and sits in a corner, drinks her juice, dips with her oatmeal. She looks at me. I wave as lightly as I can, so kids think I might have a spasmodic twitch. I haven't seen her since Sunday; I don't know what she did yesterday. I don't know how she eats if she doesn't leave her room. Same with Joy. Maybe they deliver food to her? There's still so much I don't know about this place.

"Huh, she's a sweetheart," Joy says.

"C'mon, boy, don't say that. She's just thirteen," says Joy.

"So? He's just thirteen."

"I'm fifteen."

"Well, let him say it," Joy says to me. "Leave the thirteen-year-olds to the thirteen-year-olds."

'I'm fifteen', I interrupt.

"Dariez, you should probably wait a few years, because sex at thirteen can ruin you."

"I'm fifteen!"

"Huh, I did things when I was fifteen," Joy says.

"Yes," says Joy. "With boys."

Pause. If Richard were here, he would say it out loud:

'Paوزهر.'

"Huh. This food sucks.' Joy pushes his waffles aside. "Child," he says. "Just do this for me. If you go with her, make her a little crazy.

You know what I mean?"

'Stop it', I look at joyfully. "You have a daughter that age."

'I had also set it up with my daughter. Probably do her good.'

"Wait, how do you know this? I only talked to her once, and it was really short. Nothing happened.'

'Yes, but you entered the activity centre with her.'

'We notice everything.'

I shake my head. "What's going on today?" 'At eleven o'clock the guitar boy comes. Joy, she will play.'

'Oh and?'

"Huh, when the inclination strikes."

I finish my bagel. I know what I'm going to do until the guitar boy comes: I'm going to make brain cards. I have a kind of audience now. Lacey lent me some high-quality pencils and glossy paper because I helped her clean up after the card tournament debacle so I can draw whenever I want. When I do that, kids line up to see me work. Ebony is my biggest fan; she seems to love nothing more than to sit behind me and see the cards filled in the children's heads; I think she likes them more than I do. The Professor is also great at it; she says my art is "extraordinary" and that I could sell it on the street if I wanted to. I branched out in variations: cards in children's bodies, cards in animals, cards connecting two children. It comes naturally, and it passes by the joy of time and it feels a little more accomplished than playing cards.

'I'm going to work on my art', I say to the boys.

"If I had half of your initiative, it would end differently," joy says.

"Huh, yes; I want to be you when I grow up," joy says.

I walk out with my tray.

The guitar boy's name is Neil; he has a black and a black shirt and suede pants, and he looks stoned. He comes in with a vintage-looking electric guitar — I don't know any brands, but it looks like something the Beatles would have had — and plugs it into his amp on a chair before we log in. There's something I didn't expect in the room: instruments on all the chairs around the circle and kids running for those who want them. We have visitors today, nursing students learning what it's like to work in a psychiatric hospital, and they've weighed with us and taken chairs and mediated disputes over who gets the bongo drums, the conga drums, the two sticks you hit together, the washboard and the coveted chair by the electric keyboard.

"Hey, everyone!" Neil waves. 'Welcome to musical exploration!'

He plays simple chords in a studded belt that I think should be reggae, and after a while I realize it's 'I Shot the Sheiff'. He starts singing and he just has a terrible voice, like an albino Jamaican frog, but we clock in as best we can with our voices and all the instruments we ended up with.

Armelio bangs on his chair with some sticks and gets bored, leaving the room.

Becca, the big girl, asks if she can exchange her bongos (the little ones) for my congas (the big ones, and I switch. I try to play the fillings that come after the choruses in 'I Shot the Sheiff' and Neil acknowledges that I'm trying, gives me a chance to shine every time- but I can't finish them.

Joy, right in front of me, shakes maracas and her hair, smiling. I occasionally fire a bongo filling just for her, but I'm not sure she notices. The star of the show is my-a Joy.

I had no idea that the high-pitched sounds he made were singing. As soon as the music begins, he goes straight into the universe, bangs against his washboard and leaves it all hanging in a piercing falsetto that is surprisingly on the counter. The point is that he doesn't sing "I Shot the Sheiff." He sings only one sentence:

"What's dear!"

No matter where the song is or what it is; Joy will hum along to the tune if necessary, and then, as soon as there is a pause he can be heard about, remind us, "How sweet is it!" He sounds a bit like Mr. Hankey from South Park. The nursing students, who are all West Indians like Nurse Monieec, and young, unlike her, adore him and give him a big smile, which increases his activity. My-a Joy may only have a few sentences in his repertoire, but he knows how to keep going when beautiful girls pay attention to him.

I send out filling for him. He sings back. I'm sure part of him knows we came in together. When "I Shot the Sheiff" ends in a crescendo of percussion that seems destined to never end (everyone wants to hit that last note, including me,) Neil begins the Beatles: "I want to Hold Your Hand," "I Feel Fine." The Beatles are the cue for kids to get up and dance. It starts with Becca, to the left of Neil. A nursing student pulls her up, she leaves her conga aside and starts wiggling her big ass in the middle of the circle — we scream out encouragement. She turns red and grins, and when she sits down, it's Joy's turn — he moves like John Travolta in Pulp Fiction, shaking his hips with a laconic tilt and twisting his feet more than his body.

Joy refuses to dance, but Joy is his head. The nursing students dance with each other and with Neil. Then it comes to me. I hate dancing. I've never been good at it, and I don't mean that in the traditional scared teenage way: I'm not good.

But a nursing student has both her hands out to me, and Joy is on the other side of the room.

I put my bongos aside and try to think about what I'm doing while I'm doing it. I know you shouldn't think about dancing what is that stupid expression, singing like no

one is listening, dancing like no one is watching? Whatever... I want to dance like Joy did, and I know the way to do that is to move my hips, so I focus there and think a lot. I don't think about my arms. I don't think about my legs. I don't think about my head. I think about shaking my hips back and forth and then in and out and then in circles, and all of a sudden the nursing student is behind me - I had my eyes closed and there's another one in front of me, making a Dariez Gilner sandwich, and I'm dancing like I'm one of those cool club boys with two chicks - heck, I have two chicks.

I extend my hand to Joy in a fit of trust. She gets up and we go to the middle of the floor and shake our hips, never touch, never talk, just smile with our eyes locked. I think she's looking to me for tips, so I'm talking to her:

"Shake your hips!"

She does, her arms as misplaced as mine, hanging from her sides with nowhere sexy to go. What should you put your arms on when you dance? It's like the Universal Question. I think you have to put them around someone.

When it's Joy's turn to dance, he gets up, throws down his washboard and puts his finger over his lips to Neil. Neil stops playing. My-a Joy pirouettes about the unaccompanied wild percussion we've built up and lands on his knee: "How sweet it is!"

When Neil's guitar is wrapped up, he comes along.

'Well done with those drum fillings.'

'And?'

"Yes. I haven't seen you before. What's your name?"

'Dariez.'

'You had a good rhythm; you got children moving. Ah, I hope you don't mind me asking this, but... why are you here? You look beautiful, you know, good.'

"I have depression," I say. "I had it bad. I'll get out in two days.'

'Great, beautiful, that's great to hear. I have a lot of friends with them.' He nods at me. "Once you're gone, do you ever think you could consider... volunteering in such a place?"

'Volunteering with what?'

"Well, do you play instruments?"

"No."

'Probably yes. You have a good musical feeling.'

"Thank you. I do art.'

'What kind of art?'

I lead him from the activity center past the nursing station and the phone, to my room, where Joy is in bed.

"Dariez, I hear you all in the music room," he says.

"You should have come."

Neil smiles at him, "Hello."

'Hm.'

I pull out the stack of my brain cards for Neil. "That's what I do." I give him a whole arm full, maybe fifteen of the best now. One on top is a duo, a boy and a girl with a bridge that connects the cities in their minds.

"These are cool," Neil says. He flips through it.

"Have you been doing this for a long time-?"

"It depends," I say. "Ten years or a few days, depending on how you count it."

"Can I have one?"

"I don't know if I can give them away for free." 'Ha! Listen, really, here's my card.' Neil pulls out a simple black and white business card that identifies him as a guitar therapist. "If you're out of here, and I'm sure it will be soon, give me a call and we can talk about volunteering, and - I'm serious - I might want to buy a few. How old are you? You should be on the teenage floor, but they're renovating, aren't you?" "I'm young," I say.

"I'm glad you came here and got the help you need," Neil says, and he shakes my hand at the way kids do here to remind themselves that you're the patient and they're the doctor/volunteer/employee. They like you, and they really want you to do better, but when they shake your hand, you feel that distance, that slight disconnection because they know you're still broken somewhere, that you can snap at any moment.

Neil leaves the room and I spend the rest of the day drawing and mapping with Armelio. around half past three I call Mom, tell her about the sing-along and card tournament and how I danced, and she confirms that I sound better and that she has heard from Dr. Mahmoud that Thursday is a solid day and that she and Dad will be ready when

it's Joy- to pick me up. Even though it's only a few blocks back to my house, they have to pick me up in person.

In the late afternoon, while I'm playing spit with Armelio and getting crushed, Paullie comes in and tells me I'm having a visit.

I know it's not mom or dad or Sarah; they come tomorrow for one last time, if dad brings hope to God it's not Kristopher or any of his friends. Sheet II. I- It's Emmah.

I see her through the large window in the dining room, looking like she's been crying or is about to cry, or both. She comes swinging down the hallway and I walk away from Armelio without a word going to her.

Part: 15

"What are you doing here?" I ask and then pause. That's a question other kids should ask me.

"What do you think?" She's wearing light makeup that makes her lips sparkle and her cheeks light Asian red; her hair is pulled back to accentuate the curved proportions of her face. "I'm here to see you.

"Why?"

She turns away. "I'm having a really hard time right now, okay Dariez?"

"Okay," I walk with her. "Come on, the best place to talk is here."

I lead her down the hall with familiarity and confidence that she seems to be surprised by. I think I'm a veteran here now. A kind of alpha male. Which reminds me: still no Humble.

"Here." I'm sitting here in the chairs where I was sitting with my parents and Joy, "What's going on?"

She puts her hands on her knees. She is wearing a small beige combat outfit with black boots; she looks like a Soviet soldier recruit. The light enters behind her and makes her skin sparkle. I've seen her before in this get-up; it's one of her particularly hottest: if you tie small breasts in boyish clothes, they're just as much more intriguing.

"Kristopher and I broke up," she says.

"No." I open my eyes wide.

"Yes, Dariez." She wipes her face. "After that night when he called here? And you told him I was taking Prozac?"

"What? Are you saying it's my fault?"

"I'm not saying it's anyone's fault!" She chops her arms against her thighs and takes a deep breath.

The professor peers out of her room.

"Who are you?" Emmah turns around.

"I'm Aboyda," she says. "I'm Dariez's friend."

"Well, we're trying to have a conversation; I'm sorry.' Emmah wipes her hair.

"It's okay. But you shouldn't scream. Solomon will come out."

"Who is Solomon?" Emmah turns to me. "Is he that dangerous?" "No one here is dangerous," I say, and as I say it, I put my hand over Emmah's, on her thigh. I'm not sure why I'm doing it, to reassure her? I think it's just an instinct, a reaction. Subconsciously I think it's a hot thigh and that I'd like to have my hand there without her hand serving as a buffer. I haven't had the chance to touch a girl's thigh, and Emmah's beige seem as seductive as thighs. I even think it's a sexy word: thigh.

'Dariez, hello?'

"Sorry, I was spreading out."

She looks at my hand and gives a small grin. She doesn't slide it away. "You're funny. I asked you if you like it here.'

"It's not bad. It's better than the school.'

"I believe that." Now her hand - her other hand - is on top of my hand on top of her thigh. I think of the dancing sandwich I used to sit in in the activity lounge. I feel how warm she is and remember how I noticed that at the party, eons ago. 'I've been thinking about going to a place like that.'

"What?" I pull my body away but keep my hand under hers.

"What do you mean?"

"I've thought about checking myself in, spending some time, re-entering here, or somewhere else, like you."

"Emmah." I shake my head. "You can't just come in here because you want to."
"Isn't that what you did?"

'Don't!'

"What did you do?" She tilts her head.

"I... I had a medical emergency, as it were," I explain. 'I called the Suicide Hotline and they sent me here.'

Emmah leans back. 'You called the Suicide Hotline?' She holds my hand up, grabs it. "Oh, Dariez!" I look at my crotch. I jump up. I can't help it. She's so close. This face is so close to mine and it's the same face that I've been so "Spied on~ times. I conditioned myself to want this face. I want her. I feel her on me and I want her now in her little Russian army outfit. I want to see what she looks like with it off. I want to see what she looks like with the half-finished.

'I didn't realize it...' she continues. "I knew you wanted to kill yourself; I never knew you wanted to kill yourself. I would never have told Kristopher that you had called me from that weird number if

I would have known it was so serious.'

"Well, what do you think children come here for?" My hand shakes around hers.

"To get better?" She asks.

"Yes, exactly. But you have to be bad before they make you better here.'

Emmah waves her head and her hair slips around her dark eyes. "I thought you were getting bad because of me. And I thought I could make you better.'

She's so cute. The way she holds her face, it's like she always knows the best angles. We hold each other's eyes. I see myself in hers. I look expectant, ready, eager, stupid, willing to do anything.

I don't like the way I look. Humble wouldn't like it either; it has no power or will. But I have no strength or will when I'm with her. I have no choice. We're going to do what she wants.

'What about Kristopher?' I ask.

"I told you." She almost falls in a whisper. "I broke up with him."

"You broke up with him?" I want it to be clarified.

"It was mutual. Is this important?"

"Probably apart?"

"Looks like it."

"Don't you think it's a little quick that you come in here and touch me?"

She shakes her head and caresses her lower lip. "I've been thinking about you since we were on the phone on Friday night. And now I know you so much better. You've told me all these things about you and you're really... I don't know... you're an adult. You're not like all those other kids with their stupid little problems. You're like, really ruined.' She giggles. 'In a good way... The way that gives experience.' "Huh." I'm not sure what to say. No, wait, I know what to say: Go away, go away, I don't need you; I've been on the phone with you before; I met a girl here who is cooler and smarter; but if you have a beautiful girl in front of you and she bites her lip and talks low and smiling - and you're hard - what are you going to do?

"Huh ... uh... well...' I'm stuttering again. Maybe it was Emmah who made me stutter. I sweat too. "Do you want to show me your room?" She asks.

That's a bad idea. It's as much a bad idea as a bad idea to skip meals or stay awake in bed in the morning or stop taking your Zoloft, but there's no hope for me right now. I hand over control to my lower half, which points to my room, and lead Emmah to it.

Part: 16

Joy is not in the room. I can't believe it - it's like the first time I've been here. I look at her wrinkled sheets and try to distinguish a form here, but there isn't enough bulk to explain her. I peek into the bathroom-nothing.

"Do you have a roommate?" asks Emmah.

'Yes, uh, he's usually here...'

'Ewe-www...' She waves in front of her nose. "Something smells."

'The Italian of the roommate; I don't think he's wearing deodorant.'

"Me neither."

I make like I'm cleaning up my stuff near my bed, but really, I just take my brain cards and turn them over.

"You don't get a TV?"

"No."

"Are you reading in here?"

'I like to read aloud in the room with other children. My sister gave me a Star magazine, but the nurses took it with them to read for themselves.'

She walks up to me and looks up unemployed and innocent. "Are you getting lonely here?"

"Not really," I say to her. I move her that is attached to my forehead. I'm sweating now. 'It's very social here. I've made friends.'

'How?'

"That lady you were talking to outside."

"Hair? She is so rude. She has sharpened our conversation.'

"She thinks someone sprayed insecticide in her apartment, Emmah. She becomes paranoid.' "Really? That's crazy. That's crazy.'

"I don't know. Maybe she's right.' Emmah is now a few meters away from me. Her shoulders are tilted towards me. I could pick her up and throw her on my unmade bed, just like Kristopher has done for the past two years. These words we say are just a front.

'She is a university professor.

Maybe there's something in it.'

"Dariez... 'She's standing right in front of me now. 'Remember when you called me'-she touches my forehead-'oh, you're sweating!'

"Yes, I do. When I get nervous.' "Are you okay? You sweat.' "I'm fine." I wipe it away.

"Seriously, Dariez, that's gross." She scribbles and then returns to where she was. "When you called me, do you remember how you asked what I would do if you came up to me and grabbed me and kissed me?"

'Yes...' My stomach is tight. The boy is down there pulling the rope. I thought I had hit him. I had eaten so well.

"I'd leave you," she says. "You know I would."

Now she has her shiny, sparkling lips coming to me, and I feel this amazing dichotomy going on. It's almost like before I came in here when I was lying in my mother's bed when my brain wanted to die, but my heart wanted to live. Now, literally, everything from my belly wants to run to the bathroom, throw up, talk to Armelio or Joy

or Paullie, kick Emmah out, get me ready for my second date with Joy. But the bottom half has been denied for too long. It has been ready for this for two years and it knows what it wants. It says that the real cause of all my problems is that I didn't meet them.

And these are not lips that I am presented with to correct my lack of play. These are lips that I have had access to in my head for years. I've done terrible, terrible things to these lips in the privacy of my bathroom. So screw it in. You should give it a try. I bend over and grab Emmah and push her back onto Joy's bed.

I didn't mean that; I wanted to turn her around and put her on my bed, but she happened to be standing in front of me and I couldn't change direction halfway through the grip. I cover her with my thin body and kiss her upper lip first, wrap it in my lips, then do the bottom one, then try to do them both at once, only that doesn't work, it's like I'm trying to pull the lips off her head, and she laughs, which gives me her beautiful smile to kiss, the hard white teeth - I don't mind - and then I use my tongue as I've seen in movies and put my hands on her soldier's outfit and feel what I don't have and have wanted for years, pressing back on me, tight and giving in at the same time. Two of them.

'Mm', Emmah m-mms, as she puts her little hands on the back of my head. She feels my hair; I shake at her. I can't believe how good it feels. How good does it feel? Why the hell did I ever get depressed?

I remember what Kristopher said about the inside of a girl's cheek that feels like a different place and I lick the inside of hers. She shudders; she likes it; it's like Kristopher said: she loves sex; her tongue becomes a nervous arrow sliding in and out of my mouth. I feel the ring - a small metal bubble, something to add texture, strange and dirty.

Never mind. Let's do it. I reach for the buttons of her outfit.

My eyes are closed, because when I open them, I think I might get a little too excited and ruin my pants, and mommy didn't bring me pants.

, the button I'm holding is in the middle. Up to one. No.

It's not. One more.

"God." she pulls away. 'I always wanted to hook up in a hospital.'

"What?" I look up at her chin. I'm still lying on top of her on joy's bed, my legs sticking far away and almost touching my bed.

'This was completely on my checklist.' She looks down. "Me and Kristopher have never done anything like that." That's a blow to my whole body: the bottom half that wanted this and the top half that warned me about it. I can't think of what to say: Please

don't compare me to Kristopher? Don't call Kristopher? Which checklist? So I say, "Uh... Umm..." 'Sex!' I hear from the doorway.

It's Joy it's time.

'Sex! Sex in my bed! Children make sex in my bed!' He runs to us; I jump off Emmah and hold my hands up, thinking he's going to hit me, but he grabs me and holds me close to his square smelly body and carries me like a beam to the corner of the room.

'Eh, Joy-'

"Dariez, who is that?" Emmah screams.

'I live here! Your awful girl is corrupting, my friend!' Joy puts me down, turns around and stands with his arms crossed towards Emmah, guarding me. "You're leaving!" He points to the open door.

"There is no door!" Emmah stares at it. On some sort of incredible girl-Joy-, she got up, smoothed out her outfit and collected her bag near Joy's pillow. She already has her cell phone off; it flashes at her side. She gestures to me with it.

"There's a door, yes," I say, standing on my toes talking over Joy's shoulder. "We just didn't close it-" "Don't talk to her!" Joy turns around and shakes his finger at me. "She's trying to make sex in my bed!"

"It wasn't just me, okay?" Emmah bends her face towards him.

He returns. "In case you didn't notice, Dariez was on top of me. And we weren't going to have sex." 'Girl is the seductress. My wife leaves me; I know.'

'Dariez, ik ben out-a-here.'

"Uh, okay!" I answer in Joy's back. 'Ah-' I try to summarize it. 'I like to go out with you... but I don't really like you as a person...' "Yes, the same thing here," Emmah says.

"What's going on here?" It's Paullie. He walks past the door.

"Joy, what are you doing? And excuse me, young lady?"

"I just left," Emmah says.

"You're the visitor for Dariez, aren't you?"

"Not anymore."

"What happened here?"

"Nothing," says Joey. "Everything is fine." He steps aside, turns around, and gives me what I think he thinks is a wink through his glasses.

"Yes, definitely." I catch on. "Joey just walked in and was surprised to see two kids in the room."

"Well, it should be, because you're not supposed to have visitors in your room," says Polly. "Don't let that happen again, okay?"

"No problem."

"Yes, because you'll never see me again," Emma says, giving Polly a look in disbelief as she walks away from him, stomps into the hall, and closes her shoes with every step.

He ignores us.

"Okay," he says to her back. "Sign out on your way out, Miss."

"Darry's, what kind of girl will put up with this... Crap?" Emma turns around, spreads her arms, and nods into the hall as if she owns it as she retreats. "Be quiet, Dumbaa!" shouts President Armilio from somewhere. You turn back and don't look back.

"Huh," says Polly. "Pretty girl. Everything great, boys?"

We nod like kindergarten. "Yes."

"Don't let anything like that happen again, Darry's."

"I won't."

"Otherwise, you'll be here for a long time-." Pauli walks away from the door. Joy waits for a few moments and then turns to me.

"Darry's, I'm sorry I only have very important beliefs about sex."

"No, I understand. I did something good."

"You're not in trouble, are you?"

"No, I'm fine. You handled it perfectly, boy." I reached out to get a slap from him, but he misinterprets it as a handshake attempt, so I took the initiative and turned it into a hug, a big foul smell. His glasses hit me.

"I'm abroad trying to get Italian music into the hospital," he says. "You give me an idea. But they have nothing. Now I rest." and he climbs back into bed, rearranges his sheet, curls in the fetal position, and stares through me.

Look at the door. There, with her bright green eyes wide open, she is Joey.

"I only have a few questions for you," says Joey, walking quickly at seven in the morning while I sit on the chair I have come to call my conference chair since I met the ~Sped~ kids in it. I wonder what else happened in this chair - maybe the children urinated on it, licked it, drummed their heads on it, wriggled in it blowing gibberish. This gives me comfort. It looks like a chair with some history.

I didn't think Joey would show up, so I almost didn't come - but then I decided I didn't want any regrets. I'm done with those. Regret is an excuse for children who have failed. When I go out into the world, from now on, if I begin to regret something, I will state that whatever I can do, it will not change the fact that I was in a psychiatric hospital. This, here, is the biggest regret I could ever feel. And this is not so bad.

She rushed to talk to her, but she flies into her room and closes her door. I run to her and knock, but there is no answer, and when Polly passes me, and I look, I have to stop knocking.

I check the clock in the hall and sigh. It's five. Two hours after our second appointment.

Joey seems to be looking at me for comment. But I'm amazed at how they look. New clothes: a pair of skinny blue jeans dangerously cut and a sliver of white underwear protrudes on top of it. Does underwear look like it has pink stars - does girls' underwear have pink stars? ... I almost stared, before my eyes were drawn to the soft curve of her belly to her shirt, which curled against her with a kind of mysterious feminine force, reading I hate boys.

How do girls come to me dressed in hot clothes suddenly?

Above the shirt is her face, bordered by pulled back blonde hair and highlighted by her cuts.

"Uh... Why are you wearing this shirt? I ask. "Is that a message for me?"

"No, I hate boys, not you. And this is one of the reasons: they are so arrogant. Why is that? She stands with her hands on her hips.

"Okay..." I think. "Do you want a real and honest answer?" my brain works better than it used to. Contains bread, soup, sugar and chicken. She shoots almost as she used to.

"No, Dariez, I want a big, stupid, fake answer." I think her breasts are rolling in sync with them. The girls' breasts are very amazing.

"Wait, you didn't ask a question!" I smiled. "One point for you."

"We're not playing the game, Darry's. We were going, but I'm very angry."

"Okay, well, darn..." Get started. "What were we talking about?"

"Why are boys so arrogant."

"That's right. Well, you know, they are born into the world and see that we are a little ... We tend to have things a little easier than girls. And we tend to assume that the world was built for us, and that, as you know, we are the culmination of everything that came before us. Then we're told that having a little bit of this attitude is called balls and that balls are good, and we kind of take them from there."

"Wow, you're honest," she says as she sits. "Honest fool." Yes! Sat! "Who the hell was that girl?" "A girl I know."

"She's beautiful." (It's amazing how girls can say this and make it more insulting wilt.) "Is she your girlfriend?"

"No, I don't have a girlfriend. I didn't have a girlfriend."

"So, it was just a girl you were tying inside your room?" "I saw, huh."

"I saw everything: from here to your roommate's bed."

"What, you were following me?"

"I'm not allowed?"

"Well, no-"

"You don't like it?" "You don't like a poor little girl" - casting the voice of Little Bo-Peep, blowing her hair - "Follow the big Dariez around the wing?"

"It's not a prize, it's a hospital." But yes, yes, I admire you following me. Yes, that's great. "I can't believe I didn't notice you. ..." I think of flashes of joy and time - with Emma if she looks into the hall or examines behind me.

"I was in a state of excitement. That's why."

"Okay. Do you want to know who she is?"

"No, I lost interest."

"Did you?"

"Nope! Tell me!"

"Well, well, this girl I have known for a long time - and she came here-"

"Just beat lust for you?"

"Yes, sure, exactly. Lust overcame her and took advantage of her. I flick my hand. "No, what happened is that she came here alone and confused, I think, and thinks she belongs to a place like this... "

"It was so funny when your roommate grabbed you.

That kind of made it all worthwhile."

"I'm glad you think so."

"You'll never be a good cheater. You're going to be one of those boys caught on the first attempt."

"Is that okay?"

"You didn't even close the door. How did you know the girl?"

"She's been my best friend's friend since we were thirteen."

"How old are you now?"

"Fifteen".

"Me too."

Look at it again. There's something about children who are the same age. It's like you went out in the same charge. You have to stick together. Because deep down I think my year was special: it produced me.

"So, you___ Ed is your best friend, girlfriend?"

"No, they broke up."

"When?"

"Ah, a few days ago."

"It's moving fast!"

"I think," I think out loud, "She's just one of those girls who didn't have a boyfriend." "Some of us, we used to call these girls prostitutes. Do you think she had a boyfriend when she was eight years old?"

"Ewe".

"Maybe she was leaving-"

"Stop! Stop! I don't want to hear that."

"It happens." Joy is looking at me.

She nodded, stopped, and let that sink her. It's happening.

'Um... How are you? I ask.

"You think you're really smart, don't you?"

Funnier. 'Nope. That's one of the reasons I came here. I thought I was stupid."

"Why do you think so? You're in a smart school."

"I wasn't feeling well there."

"What were you getting?"

"Ninety-three".

Oh. Gestures of joy.

"Yes." I folded my arms. "I think you're really smart. Maybe you get good grades."

"Not really." She puts her chin in the palm of her hand like a person in a painting.
"You're not good at making compliments."

"What?"

"I'm smart! Come on. "You're attractive too!" I say. "Does this work?

You are pretty! Did I actually say that? You said it that day, didn't you?

"Attractive? Darry's, properties are attractive. homes".

"Sorry, you're beautiful. How about that? I can't believe I'm saying that. We'll both be out of here in a couple of days. That's why I say so. No regrets. "Beautiful is fine. There is better."

"Okay, okay, awesome." I broke my neck-

'Ewe-www. "What?"

"Don't do that. Especially when you're about to praise me.

"Okay, okay. What words are better than beautiful?

She wears a southern accent: "Go-geous".

"Okay, okay, you're awesome."

"That sounds terrible. Do it my way: go to geous.

I'm doing it.

"Can't you even do a southern accent? Oh my God, are you even from America?
"Give me a break! I'm from here! "Knox?

"Yes."

"This neighborhood?"

"Yes."

"I have friends here.

"We must meet someday."

"You're so terrible. Try other compliments.

"Okay." I'm digging deep. I don't get it. "Uh..."

"You don't know anymore?"

"I'm not good with words."

"Look, that's why math nerds don't have daughters."

"Who said I was obsessed with math? I told you my grades sucked.

"You might be one of those unintelligent nerds. They are the worst.

"Listen," stop it. "I'm really glad you're here to talk to me, and I've met a lot of kids here."

"Oh, oh," she said. "Is this the part where everything gets dangerous?"

"Yes," I said. And when I say it, the way I say it, I see that she understands that I really want to be serious. I can be serious now. I've been through some serious and I can be as serious as someone older.

"I love you so much," he began. No regrets. "Because you're funny and smart and because you seem to like me." I know that's not a good reason, but I can't help it. If a girl likes me, I tend to admire her back.

Say nothing. I bow my head towards her. "Ah, do you want to say something?" "Nope. No! This is good. Keep advancing." "Well, well, I've been thinking about how to put this. I like you for all that but I'm also kind of like you because of the wounds on your face-'

"Oh no, are you an idol?"

"What?"

"Are you like a blood fetish? There was one here before. He wanted me to love the Queen of the Night or something.

"Nope! This is not so. It's like this: when children have problems, you know... I came here and I see that children everywhere have problems. I mean, the kids I befriended are pretty much a bunch of criminals, old drug addicts, kids who can't keep a job. But then, every few days, a new person comes along who seems to have just come out of a business meeting.

Gestures of joy. She also saw them: the dirty little boy who came today with a pile of books as if it were a reading retreat.

The boy who came yesterday in a suit and practically told me that he heard sounds and that they were really annoying. They didn't say anything scary but they always said the stupidest things during his trial.

And not just here: everywhere. All my friends are calling me now: this person is depressed, this person is depressed. Look at what doctors are offering, some studies show that one-fifth of Americans have mental illness, suicide is the second killer among teenagers and all this nonsense ... I mean, everyone is taut.

"What are you getting?"

"We carry our problems differently. As if I'm not talking, stop eating and vomiting all the time -

"Did you vomit?"

'Yes. Wrong. And I stopped sleeping. And when I started doing that, my parents noticed, and my friends noticed, sort of, that they were laughing at me, but I could travel the world without detecting the error. Until I come here. Now it's like: something is wrong. Or he was wrong, because I feel that he is improving.

"What does that have to do with me?"

"You're there for your problems," I said. "You put them on your face.

She stops, puts her hand in her hair.

"I cut my face because a lot of kids ~Sped~ a lot of kids ~Sped ~ wanted something from me," she tries to explain. "There was a lot of pressure, it was-"
"Something to respect?"

"Exactly."

"The kids told you were sexy and then suddenly they treated you differently?"

"Right."

"How?"

Sighs. "You have to be rude or a, and if you choose one, other kids hate you because of it, and you can't trust anyone anymore, because they all pursue the same thing, and you see that you can never go back to what it was before..."

She puts her face in one of those faces that can laugh or cry - they use a lot of ~Sped~ of the same muscles - and leans forward.

"I didn't want to be a part of it," she says. "I didn't want to be part of this world."

I caught her leaning against me, and for the first time I felt a soft boil in her body.
"Neither do I."

She puts her arms around me and we stand like this from our chair, like a house built on top of them, and I don't move my hands at all and "I wasn't okay there." "What did you get?" "Ninety-three". "Oh." Gestures of joy. "Yes." I said to my arm. "I think you're really smart."

Maybe you have good grades.

"Not really." She puts her chin in the palm of her hand like a person in a painting.
"You're not good at making compliments."

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"Sorry, you're beautiful. How about that? I can't believe I'm saying that. We'll both be out of here in a couple of days. That's why I say so. No regrets. "Lovely good. There is better."

"Okay, okay, awesome." I broke my neck-

"Ewe-www".

"What?"

"Don't do that. Especially when you're about to compliment me.

"I totally agree. What are the best words from the beautiful?

It puts a southern accent: "Go-geous".

"Okay, okay, you're beautiful."

"It sounds terrible. Do it my way: "Go-geous".

and to.

"Can't you even do a southern accent? Oh my God, are you even from America?

"Leave me alone! I came from here!

"Knox?

Yes."

"This area?

"Yes."

"I have friends here.

"We must meet someday."

"You're so terrible. Try other compliments.

"Okay-" I'm digging deep. I don't get it. "Uh..."

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"Nope. No! This is good. Keep advancing."

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Me-

-I-I-love you for all this but I also love you for the wounds on your face-'

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She puts her face in one of those faces that can laugh or cry - they use a lot of ~Sped~ of the same muscles - and leans forward.

"I didn't want to be a part of it," she says. "I didn't want to be part of this world."

I catch her leaning against me, and I feel the first joy of time - the soft dimple of her body. "Neither do I."

Her arms wrap around me and we stand like a house built on top of our chair, and I don't move my hands at all and neither does she.

"I didn't want to play the smart game," I told him. "And she didn't want to play the beautiful game.

"The beautiful game is worse," she whispers. "Nobody wants to use you to be smart."

"The kids wanted to use you?

Someone did. Someone should not.

I stop.

"I'm sorry."

"It wasn't you.

"Shouldn't I touch you?

"No, no, she didn't do anything. This is good. But yes.

It happened. And I lied before.

"About what?"

"It doesn't matter what kind of operation you had. I did it with a chisel half, Dariez. It will leave scars. I will have scars for the rest of my life. I didn't know what I was doing. I just wanted to leave the world a little bit after this... This thing ... And now I can never get a job or anything. What will they say when I go to an interview? Employment sounds like...?" "She smells and laughs and the mucus comes out." ... Like Klingon?"

"There are places in Kalifor-Emma where they talk.

Clingon. You can get a job there.

"Stop it."

We still hold each other. I don't want to look. Keep my eyes closed. "There are also anti-discrimination laws. They cannot hire you if you are qualified. But I look eccentric now."

"I told you, Joey, I said in her ear. Everyone has problems. Some children hide their nonsense better than others. Run away. They will look at you and think they can talk to you, you will understand, you are brave, you are strong. And you. You are brave and strong.

"You get better with compliments."

"No, I'm nothing. I can barely restrain the food.

"Yes, you're skinny. Laugh. "We need to fatten you."

"I say."

"I'm glad to meet you."

"You're naked and honest, Joey. That's who you are." Words come to mind as if they were always there. "And in Africa your scars will be highly valued."

Inhale again. "I didn't love seeing you with that other girl."

'I know. '

"You love me more, don't you?"

"Right."

"Why?"

I walk away from her - perhaps the first time - in my life I finished a hug - because the level of eye contact is essential.

"I owe you much more than I owe her." My real eyes were closed for so long on Joey's shoulder that the room was blinded. But when they adjust, I see the professor watching us from her door, holding the handshake with one hand and his shoulder with the other.

"I wanted to show you this. I reach under my seat to pick up something for our meeting - I had it there as an asset. I didn't think history would go that way. I thought it would be joy screaming at me and

That I have to do something radical. But now I can do something radical and it will be like icing on a cake. I pull out my husband's card brain and show it to him.

"It's beautiful!"

"It's a boy and a girl, you see? I didn't style my hair, but you see how one has a female image and the other masculine. They lie down, not on top of each other, only side by side, floating in space. They have legs and arms drawn on the sides, but that's the whole point of my brain maps - you don't need to spend a lot of time on legs or arms. What they have is full of minds and complete with swirling bridges, intersections, squares and parks. These are the most detailed I've ever done: split arteries, alleys, Mill Run Road, roundabouts. -Points, tunnels and toll booths. The paper is 14 × 19 inches and I had space to make huge maps. Bodies are small and insignificant. The main element that catches your eye (because I now understand, somehow, so works of art) is a high bridge between the two heads, longer than the Kinzoa bridge, even with rolls of railings like shattered strips at each end.

"That's probably my best so far," I said.

Check. I see the red in his eyes fading. There are no lines of tears - I still haven't seen real lines of tears on anyone. Her tears went straight to my shirt. Now they're cooling and rubbing on my shoulder. "I suggested I do some things in childhood," he continues. "I used to do this as a kid, and I forgot how much fun it was."

"I bet you've never done it like that."

"No, well, it's easier, because I don't have to finish the cards."

"It's nice."

"Thank you for letting me start. I owe you a lot."

"Thanks. Can I keep it? She looks up. "Not yet. I have to fix it. I stand up, stretch my back and shrug my shoulders.

Do it, soldier.

Yes sir!

"But, uh, I was wondering if I could get your phone number, so I could call you when we get out of here."

She smiles and her wounds define her face like a cat's whiskers.

"Cunning".

"I'm a boy," I say.

"And I hate boys," she said.

"But the boy is different," I said.

"Maybe a little bit," she said.

Humble returned for dinner. He has brand new clothes, a clean shaven face, and completely unopened eyes. He settles on his usual table under the TV in the dining room, which everyone left empty during his absence. Joy is there too, on the next table, and her back to him. I enter, say hello to both, grab the tables, put them together and sit between them smiling.

"Joey, I don't know if you have the chance to meet Humble.

"Not really," she said. She always smiles. From our history, I hope.

"Modest, joyful. Joyful, unpretentious.

"Ah huh..." He said, narrowing his eyes. "Those wounds on your face are stumbling."

"Thank you?" they shake hands.

"You have a good handshake for a girl," Humble said.

"I've got a good one for a boy.

My dinner is beans, hot dogs and salads, with cookies and pears at the end. I'm attacking him.

"So where did they take you?" I ask between bites.

"Across the hall to geriatrics," Humble said.

"With old children?" asks joy.

'Yes. This is where they take you when they need to drive you crazy.

"Where did you hear the term" idiot "?" asks joy.

"Hit? "A humble tearing a piece of lettuce from his teeth with his thumb.

"No, she thinks you're saying 'Wack,' like 'it's Wack,' I explain.

"Fool, fool, multiplied is the same word. It's an old word. I had an uncle named Waki, what are you kidding? Boy, don't start with me. This child has a lot of problems.

"yes, I know," Joey said. Her knee hits my thigh. Impressive. A girl who hasn't done this to me since fourth grade. "He's in disarray."

"I know," Humble said. "That's because he's too smart for his own good. Come here. It's exhausting. I've already seen it. I see everything joy, but in children in their twenties and thirties. This boy is so smart that he burned half the time. He had a midlife crisis as a teenager.

"Forget the midlife crisis," I say. "It's all about the sixth life crisis. "

What is this?

"Okay..." Look at the joy. Won't she hit me with her leg again? I don't know if I want to talk. I don't want to carry it. But I know I'm not going to upset Humble, and if I don't bother him either, it will be a big win.

"Well, first there is the crisis of a quarter of life," I said. "He's like the characters in Friends-Kids who are afraid that they won't get married. The twenty-year-old. It is

probably true that children have quarter-old seizures. I don't know but I know things are going faster now. You used to wait until you were 20 years old to have enough options in your life to start the horror. But now there is a lot to do. Buy, thus ~ Sped ~ Ways to pass your time and joy, and therefore ~ Sped ~ Disciplines that you need to start very early in ballet Realistic, well, joy, when did you start ballet?

"Four".

"Okay. Tai Po started when I was six years old. So there's a proverb - ~ Sped ~ kids hunting for success and so ~ Sped ~ colleges that are supposed to enter it and so ~ Sped ~ women that are supposed to have sex with - '

"You should scare them," Joy said from around the room. "You have

Have you been spoken? Humble asks.

"Huh, eat your salt."

"What, Bads? What if I hit you on the head, how do you want-'

"Boys". Joey stands and combs her hair away from her cheeks, which is red plus cut. Everyone is silent.

"So now," I continue, "instead of a quarter of life crisis, they have a fifth life crisis when you're eighteen and a sixth life crisis when you're fourteen. I think that's what a lot of kids have.

"What you have."

"It's not just me. It's... Ah... Should I continue? "Yes," Joey said.

"Well, there are a lot of kids who make a lot of money from life's fifth and sixth crises. Suddenly they have a lot of scared consumers ready to buy face cream, designer jeans, SAT prep classes, condoms, cars, scooters, self-help books, watches, wallets, stocks, whatever... All the crap of the twenties that used to buy it, and now ten people buy it. They doubled their market!

Joey pulled a chair beside me. "This kid is crazy," he said.

"I hope they keep it here," Humble said.

"Very soon." I'm still thinking. "There will be a seventh and eighth life crises. Then finally a baby will be born and doctors will look at him and immediately wonder if he is not equipped to face the world; if they decide that this does not seem happy, they will put him on antidepressants, and start him on this drinking path.

"They," Humble said. I think he'll keep going on with something, but instead he goes, "they."

Then- like... "Your problem is that you have an informed view of depression to the world." Bow. "And rabies?"

"I was never angry."

"Why?"

"He's angrier in my head than he could be outside." "Additional cookies!"

She is one of the nurses. We all line up. It is oatmeal and peanut butter. As I pull my feet forward, Joey pushes me from behind. When I turned to her, she turned her face away as if I was trying to kiss her but she wouldn't let me.

"Your problem," I said.

"You're stupid," she answers.

I didn't do it. She spoke - and she loved me. I thought I was smart. I start making a plan. As soon as I get my cookies, I go to the phone to call Dad, who will already be attending Blade II tomorrow night. I want him to bring something else too.

It's your last full day in the hospital, and that's what I think when I wake up - no one takes my blood today (it only happened once since Sunday) so I don't wake up too early, but I'm always the first in the corridors. I take a shower and think about how life will suck if hot water doesn't come out of the front view when you want to. I've tried cold showers and they're great when you're done, but during the procedure they feel like a form of animal torture. But again, that's when you take a cold shower, you're supposed to get in and out as soon as possible. That's why they do it in the military.

It's real! Do you want to shoot, soldier?

I don't think... Mister.

Come on, what's up with you? You have a lot for you. Don't want to continue?

Need a cold shower to get things done?

It's real. Less time in the bathroom, more on the battlefield.

Good.

I can do it. I reach out and slowly turn the temperature handle to the left, then decide that I will not do it gradually, so I will have to do it like first aid - shake it. The

water turns from lukewarm to freezing so quickly that it feels like it's burning me. I bend my thighs out of his way, but I know this is cheating, so I push him back into place while I get hit furiously. Man: Top!

Down! Other leg: up! Down! Crotch: Uh, rub rub. Chest: Clear. Arm: Down! Return! Other arm: down! Return! Neck and face, wrap and wash your ass as I get out! Straight to the towel. I wrap it around me and shiver.

I can't wait to get dressed so much that my socks stick to my wet feet. I'm going out to talk to Paulie.

"How are you?"

First cold shower."

"From today?"

"From my life."

"yes, that's going to hit you."

"What's the news?"

Polly holds her paper. A new candidate running for mayor of Knox appears to promise to give everyone who votes for him a hug dance. He's a billionaire, and at \$100 for a lap dance, he thinks he can secure the vote. Many women support it.

"It's crazy." I'm shaking. "It's like... From here and from here, you know?"

"Absolutely. Better music here, though. Polly turns on the radio.

"By the way, this is a question I ask me: Can I play music in the lobby tonight? At the other end?"

"What kind?"

"No words, don't worry, nothing offensive. It's something that one of the kids in the room will love. Like a gift.

"I have to see it first."

"Okay. And you know I'm bringing this code? Movie tonight to watch with the band.

"Think about it for a minute. You are presenting a vampire movie on a floor full of psychopaths.

"They can handle it."

"I'm not going to have nightmares?" ' "

Promise."

"Nightmares are a big problem in my job, Dariez."

"I see."

Polly sighs, puts her paper down and gets up. "Do you want me to do your vital signs?"

He attaches me to the chair, pumps me and puts his soft fingers on my wrists. Today I have 120/70. On the first day I wasn't perfect.

Faction: 1

"How are you?" Dr. Ross like.

It's 11 a.m., she sighed. After the vital signs, it was breakfast, where the boy who was afraid of gravity and the rolling pin Robert went. Humble and Joey told me they had been released. Towards the end of the meal, Joey touched her leg against my legs as long as it took me to drink my first sip of Swee-Touch Nee tea after breakfast, which was a big sip. Monique then announced that we would be showing Blade II tonight in front of the smoking room and everyone was excited, especially Joy: "Huh, this movie is great. Many bloodsuckers die. There is no announcement of my music, but again it has not yet arrived.

I took Zoloft out of my little plastic cup and mapped the brain out of the window in the corner of the lobby next to My-a Joy. I processed my phone messages, and I started thinking seriously about what I would do once I got out - would I buy a cup of coffee? Walk to the park? Go home and start with email?

-And-

This made me think about email, and suddenly I was really happy that I had Dr. Ross to talk to. "I'm fine, I think."

She looks at me calmly and firmly. Maybe it's an anchor.

"What puts you in doubt, Dares?"

"Sorry?"

"You said you were fine," she thinks. Why just think about that?

"It's an expression," I said.

"It's not the place to go if you're not feeling better, Dariez."

"Okay, well, I thought about my email."

"Yes?"

"I'm really worried about going out and having to check it out. Phones that stuck with it, but email can be pretty deadly."

"Deadly... How deadly can email be, Darry's?"

"Good". I straighten, take a deep breath. Then I remember something. "Do you know how hard it was to start and stop my sentences before?"

"Yes."

"Not recently."

"Really?"

"Yes, it's the opposite, like words can come out of me, like I did when I was in trouble in class." "What was..." She focuses on her notebook to write this.

"A year ago - I went to pre-professional executive."

"Now, tell me about email." "Email". I put my hand on the table. "I hate it. Like, now, I haven't checked it in five days, okay?"

" Since Saturday. She nodded.

"That's right. Now, what are the kids trying to reach me thinking? They're kids, maybe they already have an idea where I am because

Emma told Christopher the number and he got it.

"Well: a great source of shame for you."

"Yes. But even if someone has no idea where I am, what do they think? Five days. They're like: he's crazy. He must have overdosed or something. Everyone expects me to respond immediately and I am unable to do so.

"Who sends you emails, Darry's?"

"Children who want homework, teachers, school clubs, announcements of charities I should volunteer for, invitations to football matches, basketball games, executive squash before professionals..."

"So it's mostly school-related."

"They are all attached to the school. My friends don't send me an email. They're calling."

"So why not ignore emails?" '

I can't!

"Why not?"

"Because children will feel offended!"

"And... What happens next?"

"Well, I wouldn't be able to join clubs, get credits, participate in things, get extra credits... I will fail."

"At school."

"Right." I'm taking a break. No, it's not exactly a school. That's what comes after school. "To life."

"Oh." It stops. "Life".

"Right."

"To fail in school is to fail in life.

"Well... I'm in school!" it's the only thing I'm supposed to do. I know a lot of famous kids didn't do well at school, like James Brown. He dropped out of fifth grade to be an artist, and I respect that... But it won't be me. I won't be able to do anything but work as hard as possible with all the joy – and compete with everyone I know with all the joy – to get there. And now school is the only thing I have to do. And I'm away from email and can't do that.

"But your definition of school is not one thing, it is ~Sped~ different things, Dariez: extracurricular activities plus sports plus volunteering. Not to mention homework.

"Law".

"How worried are you about all this, Dariez?"

I think back about what Joy said, about anxiety being something medical. I've had email in the back of my head since I got here, and the stubborn certainty that when I go out, I'll have to sit in front of the computer for five or six hours browsing through everything I missed, and respond to it by reversing the order because that's how it

happens, and therefore it takes the longest Joy- time to respond to kids who emailed me in the past at the most. And then, as I respond to them, the others will come along, and they'll sit on top of my pile and laugh at me, challenge me to respond to them before I go deeper, and tell me I need them, unlike one or two emails that actually relate to something I'm interested in. These will be saved to the end, and through joy - I have joy - to care for them, they will be so overwhelmed that I will only have to apologize: sorry, my boy. I couldn't reply to my email. No, I'm not important, just can't.

Darry's?

"Very worried," I replied.

"Email anxiety and chess speeches... These are the topics that I have already touched on. They hurt you a lot. "I know. I'm sweating."

"Are you?"

"Yes. I haven't sweated for a while.

"I've been away from your claws."

"Law. Not again. Now I can go back and they are all there for me.

"Do you remember what I asked you about last time, Joy-, about whether or not you found anchors here?"

"Yes."

It stops. To ask a question, it is often possible for Dr. Ross to just indicate that she can ask a question.

"I think I found one," she sighed.

"What is it?"

"Can I get up and take it?"

"Absolutely".

I leave the office and walk down the hallway, where Joey leads a recruit on her welcome tour - a black boy with crazy teeth and a stained blue tracksuit.

"That's Dariez," Joey said. "He's young, but he's at the level. He makes drawings.

I shake hands with the boy. It's real. I make drawings.

"Mother-being", boys ...

"That's his name," Joey explains as she rolls her eyes.

"Your name is not Dariez. The boy said that he was a mother - also running.

I nodded, broke the handshake and continued walking to my room. It's literally like moving away from a monster - the farther away from the idea of emails and Dr. Ross and the fact that I'll have to leave here and go back to Executive Preprofessional, the calmer I become. And the closer I get to brain maps, that stupid little thing I can do, the calmer I become. I walk next to Joey - staring at me and trying to sleep - and pull my technician out of the radiator cover. I put him in a pile in front of Joy and Um-Being - who now explains how his real last name is Green and that's what he needs, a green return to the office.

"I like it here," I told Dr. Ross.

"That's the bass?"

"No, the hospital.

"When you're done, you can volunteer."

"I've spoken to guitarist Neil about it. I think I'll try. I can get school credit!

"That's why you should volunteer, Dariez-"

"No, no... I shake my head. "I'm just kidding." "Oh." Dr. Ross cuts his face with a broad smile. "So what do we have here?"

I put them on the table. There are now twenty. No crazy hacks, just variations on the theme: pigs with Pittsburgh-like brain maps, my relationship with Joey joined by the sweeping bridge, a family of big cities.

"Your artwork," she says.

She flips them around, saying "oh, my" to the particularly good. I built that pile last night, not just for Dr. Ross, for anyone. Brain maps have a certain order. Since I've been making them, they specify that they should be stacked for presentation.

"Darry's, they're great."

"Thank you." Sit down. We were standing. I didn't even notice.

"You started this because you were doing it when you were four years old?"

"Law. Ok. Thing... Like them.

"And how do they make you feel?

Look at the pile. "Interesting".

She leans. "Why?"

I have to think about it, and when Dr. Ross makes me think, I don't get embarrassed and try to ignore it. I look left and caress my chin.

"Because I do it," I said. "I do it and it's over. It's almost like, you know, peeing?"

"Yes..." "Dr. Ross nodded. "Something you appreciate." "Law. Yes; It's successful it's a good feeling, I know it's – good. When I finish one, I feel like I've done something and can spend the rest of my day doing anything, stupid, emails, phone calls, everything else.

(Dariez, avez-vous déjà envisagé le fait que vous pourriez être un artiste ? » "J'ai d'autres trucs aussi", je continue. Qu'a-t-elle dit?) - "Dariez, have you ever considered the fact that you could be an artist?" "I have other stuff too," I continue. What did she say?

"First of all, I was thinking of this permanent candle, like a candle on the ground with another candle hanging upside down on top of it, and when the first candle melts, the wax is kept molten by a kind of hot containment unit and pumped to the second candle and dripping like a stalactite and stalagmite thing, and then I was also thinking: what if I filled a shoe with whipped cream? Just a boy's shoes full of whipped cream? It is very easy to do this. And then you can continue: a T-shirt filled with Jell-O, a hat full of cider ... That's art, isn't it? That kind of thing. What do you say about artists?"

It's a chuckle. "You seem to enjoy what you're doing here."

"yes, well, duh, it's not the hardest thing in the world."

"You're not sweating now."

"That's a good anchor for me," I say. I admit. I admit it. It's a stupid thing to admit. This means that I am not practical. But then again, I'm already in the trash. How practical will I get? I may have to give up my work. "That's right, Dariez. This can be your anchor. Dr. Ross stares at me and doesn't blink. I look at her face, the wall behind her, the door, the shadows, the table, my hand on the table, the brain maps between us. I could do one on top a little better. I can try to put some wood grain there with the streets. A knot of wood in the heads of children. It can work. "This could be my anchor." I nodded. "But..."

"What, Dariez?"

"What am I going to do about school? I can't go to Executive Pre-Professional for art."

"I'm going to throw a wild thought at you." Dr. Ross leans back, then forward. "Have you ever thought about going to a different school?" I didn't. I honestly didn't.

Not once, not in my whole life, not since I started there. This is my school. I worked harder to get in than I did for anything else, ever. I went there because, after getting out of it, I would be able to be president. Or a lawyer. Rich, that's the whole point. Rich and successful.

And look where you got me. One stupid year - not even one, like three-quarters of one - and here I am not with one, but two bracelets on my wrist, next to a shrink in a room next to a hill where there is a boy named um - being wandering. If I continue to do this for another three years, where will I be? I will be a total loser. And what if it continues? What if you are feeling well, living with depression, getting into college, going to graduate school, getting a job, getting money, getting children, a wife and a beautiful car? What kind of crap would I be at the time? I'm going to be completely crazy.

I don't want to be completely crazy. I don't like being here too much. I like to be a little crazy: it's enough to volunteer here, never, never, come back.

"Yes," I say. "Yes - I thought about it."

"When? Only now?"

Smile. "Absolutely".

"And what do you think?"

I clap my hands together and stand. "I think I should call my parents and tell them I want to move to school." "The visitor, Dariez," Pauli pokes his head into the dining room. I pull my seat back from the table, playing poker after lunch with My-a Joy, Joy and Armelio. My-a Joy has no idea how to play, but we hand him the cards and he plays them face down and he smiles and we give him more chips (we use scraps of paper; the buttons are locked due to our recklessness) whenever he puts his pockets or chews them.

"I'll be back," I say.

"This boy is very busy," says Armelio.

"He thinks it's very important," says Joey.

"I woke up, and the bed was burning!" says my joy.

We all look at him. "You're okay, my joy?" I ask. "My mother hit me on the head. She hit me on the head with a hammer."

"Oh, wow." I turn to Armelio. "I heard him say things like that in the emergency room. Has he ever talked about this?"

"No, no, uh, my friend."

"Hey, delight, it's okay." I put my hand on his shoulder. At the same time, I bite my tongue. You can think that someone is funny and you want to help them at the same time.

"She hit me on the head," he says. "With a hammer!"

"yes, but you're here now," Joey says. "You're safe. No one will hit you on the head with anything."

Joy gesture May. I keep my hand on his shoulder. I keep my tongue a little lower, but I make small noises as I try to get away from laughing, looking up and noticing. He smiles at me, then laughs himself, then picks up his papers and claps my back.

"He's going to come to Yah," he says.

"That's right. I know it will."

I am excused from the room and head to the hall. At the end is Christopher, who holds the record I want. Dad didn't have it.

"Hello boy," he says shyly, and when I approach, lean against the wall. He's a dick, but I'm not perfect either, so I came and hugged him.

"Hey."

"Well, you were right. My father was Italian.

Masters Volume III.

"I appreciate this." I'm taking the record. She has an image on the cover of what looks like a Nile at dusk, with a palm tree swaying to the left, echoing the bright moon, and the purple sky rolling from the horizon.

"Yes, I'm sorry for everything," Christopher says. "I... Ah...

I've had two strange days."

"You know what?" I look him in the eye. "Me too." "I bet." Smiling.

"yes, from now on, the lower the crap, you can be like, 'Oh, Darry's, you've had a bad few days,' because I'm going to get what you're talking about."

"What's it like here?" he asks.

"There are children whose lives have been spoiled for a long time, and then there are children like me, whose lives have been spoiled for... You know... shorter."

"Did they put you on new drugs?"

"No, the same as the one I was before."

"So, do you feel better?"

"Yes."

"What has changed?"

"I'm leaving school."

"You what?"

"I'm done. I'm going somewhere else."

"Where?"

"I don't know yet. I'll talk to my parents. Somewhere for art."

"Do you want to do art?"

"Yes. I've been doing some here. I'm good at it."

"You're very good at school too, boy."

I shrugged my shoulders. You don't need to explain this to Christopher. He has been demoted from the most important friend to friend, and he will have to earn that, even. And you know what? I don't owe the kids anything, and I don't have to talk to them more than I feel I need.

"What's up with Emma?" I ask... You should step carefully here.

"I got your message, about how bad things were."

"It's been worked out. It was my fault. I was horrified that she was taking pills and we broke up for a few days."

"Why did that scare you?"

"I don't need more of that in my life, you know? I mean, it's bad enough with my dad.

"Is he taking medication?"

"Every form of medication in the book. Mom too. Then I, with fate... When you come directly to it, there is no one in the house who is not seriously anesthetized except for fish.

"And — she didn't want to be your girlfriend either."

"It's one thing to smoke it. Just me... I can't explain it. I think you will have to go out with someone for a long time - to understand them. If you are with someone then you have learned that they need to... Take something daily, wondering - how can you be good for them?

"That's so stupid," I say. "I met this girl here—"

"Oh yes?"

"Yes, and she's taut, tight like me, but I don't see that as an insult. I see this as an opportunity to connect."

"yes, okay."

"Children are confused in this world. I'd rather be with someone who is taut and open about it than with someone who's perfect and... You know... Ready to explode."

"I'm sorry, Dariez." Christopher looks at me deeply and reaches out to me to slap her. "I'm sorry I was a for you."

"I was a." I slap his hand. "This album partially compensates for that. Just, don't do it again. "Okay." He nodded.

We stand still for a minute. We didn't move from the core of the lanes near the entrance to Six North. The double doors from which I entered behind him are eight feet.

"Okay, listen," he says. "Enjoy the record. And - hey, they have a standard player here?"

"They still smoke here, Christopher. They kind of came back in time."

"Enjoy it and keep in touch, and I'm sorry again. I think you won't chill for a while.

"I don't know. I might never feel cold again."

"Did you almost kill yourself to get here?" asks Christopher.

"That's what Emma told me."

"Yes."

"Why?"

Because I wasn't able to deal with the real world."

"Dariez, don't kill yourself, okay?"

"Thanks."

"Just... Don't."

"I won't."

"I'll see you soon, boy."

Christopher turns around, and the nurses open the door for him. He's not a bad boy. He's just someone who hasn't stayed at Six North yet. I take the log to Paullie to store it behind the nurses' station.

Six North doesn't need a PA system, because of President Armilio, but it does have a system that is regularly used for simple, rhythmic messages like "lunch," "medicine," and "all smokers are served to the smoking lounge." Smokers, get your smoke." This afternoon, she flows with a longer message, courtesy of Monique.

"Ladies and gentlemen, this afternoon, our patient Dares Gellner, who is leaving tomorrow, will be painting his artwork for everyone on earth. If you want a piece of art by Darry's, come to the end of the lobby next to the dining room.

End of the dining room hallway, five minutes. Enjoy!

I sit in the back chair, by the window that overlooks the street that crosses the street where I live, close to my real life. I look at my conference chair where I meet my dad and Joey. I have a second chair set up in front of me as a technical desk, with piles of board games and a chessboard on top. It's a bit flimsy, but it will.

President Armilio is the first to approach me. Stepping upwards, barrel chest and self-confident, like a torpedo. "Hey, buddy, that's great! Will you make me one of your heads with the maps inside?

"That's right."

"Well, let's go, buddy. I'm not all day!

Right. Armelio will have to do quickly because he is fast. I draw the outline of his head and shoulders without a second thought and start mapping his brain. Highways, this is what Armelio has in its six-lane highways that run in parallel, stretching through the city, with purpose and minimal slopes. It doesn't have any quiet little streets or parks. They are highways and network, and there are no rivers either.

The highways hardly connect because Armelio does not mix his thoughts. He has one and does it and then moves on to the next. It's a great way to live. Especially when the biggest thought is the desire to play cards. The cards in Armelio's brain must be represented somewhere. So, I draw some streets in a spades ace right in the middle - it's not a great spades ace, but Armelio gets it.

"Spades! My friend, I'm crushing you in spades.

I put my initials on it, uppercase and bold, "CG" like "computer-created".

"I'll keep this, for real," says Armelio. "You're a good boy, Dariez." He shakes my hand. "Do you want my number when you go?"

"Absolutely-" take out a piece of paper.

"It's an adult home," says Armelio. "You're going to have to order Spyros, which is my other name." He gave me the number and moved aside, and there Ebony, with her stick and velvet pants, slapped her lips.

"I heard... You were making your mind for children."

"That's right! And you know who was the first person to say they were brains?

"I!"

"Absolutely. Now, look" - I nod to the pile of my work on the ground - "Now I have all this."

"So – I'm paid, right?" laughs ebony.

"Not quite. I haven't done that yet. as an artist."

"I know. It's difficult."

"So, you just get a brain map of yourself, okay?"

"Good!"

I trace her head by hand, I look at her, not the paper. I look down and it's very good. Ebony brain ... What's there? Lots of circles, for all the buttons I stole. It was a nut

with those buttons. She didn't mess up. Quite striped. And with all her gambling skills, she needs a bar, like Vegas. So, I get a big street in the middle and a lot of traffic circles around it, with circular parks, circular shopping malls and small circular lakes. It looks less like a city and more like a necklace with a central band and tons of sagging collected jewelry.

"It's beautiful!" she says.

"I'm done." I hand it to her.

"You love doing this, don't you?"

"Yes. It helps, you know... With my depression. I came here with depression."

"Imagine you had depression when you were eleven years old," says Ebony. "If all my children were in this room, this room would be full, I tell you."

"Do you have children?" I ask, keeping my voice low.

"I've had thirteen miscarriages," she says. "Imagine that." She looks at me without any of the humor or attitude she usually wears, only with big, wide eyes and empty questions.

"I'm so sorry," I say.

"I know. I know you are. That's the thing."

Ebony shuffles away as she flaunts her image ("It's me! See? Me!") She doesn't leave a phone number. The humble is next.

"Well, boy, what kind of scam did you get here?"

"Nothing." I start at Humble's bald head. Easy bald heads. You know, if I had to now, I think I could handle the lower end of Knox. I'm looking at

Modest. He raises his eyebrows at me. "Make me look good, okay?"

Laugh - inside the head of Humble is an industrial mess.

I don't make any small blocks, just big blocks - the block type where you find timber shops, factories and bars where Humble hangs out and works. The ocean was placed there, to represent his hometown, Bensonhurst, which borders the ocean, where he communicated with all these girls on the way back. Then I sprinkle it with highways,

wipe out the streets and put them on top of the top, throw into crazy intersections for no reason, which makes the whole thing seem violent and random, but also powerful and real - the kind of mind that can come up with some great stuff if you harness it right. When I'm done, I look up.

"I think he's fine." Tolerates.

I chuckle. "Thanks, humble."

"I want you to remember me," he says. "No kidding. When you're a big artist or whatever, you should invite me to a party."

"It's a deal," I say. "But how will I be in touch?"

"Oh, right - I have a number!" says modest. "I will stay in a seaside paradise. It's the same house Armilio will go to, but I'll be on a different floor." Give me the number. I put it on the same paper as Armelio.

"You won't be in touch," Humble says.

"I will," I say.

"No, you won't. I can tell. Miss Sea East Dacord. You have a lot for you. Just don't burn again. Shake. Next is

Cheer up. "Hey girl!"

"Don't you dare to start calling me that? That's very nice of you to do.

"The least I can do. They're all wonderful kids."

"You're like a celebrity now. Everyone wants to know if I'm your girlfriend."

"And what do you say to them?"

"No!" and then walk away."

"Good invitation".

"So, what are you trying to pull out? I've already made one of these for me. I just said it's not over yet."

I pull the person who made it for her, with the boy and girl connected to the bridge, and write my phone number on the back.

"Oh my God."

"Now it's over." I smile and stand. I bow and whisper: "It took me twice as long as any of the others. And I'll make you better when I go out –

It pushes me away. "Yes, as I want your stupid art."

"You do." I lean backwards. "I've seen how I've looked at it before."

"I'm going to keep it to make you feel good," she says. "That's it."

"Fine." She leans inward and kisses my cheek. "Thank you, on the ground."

"You're welcome. Hey, what are you doing tonight? "Well... I thought I was going to hang out in the psychiatric hospital. What about you?

"I have big plans," I say. "We have a movie coming-"

"Well, I don't see this stupid movie."

"I know." Drop to whisper. "But when the middle of the road is over, do you want to meet in my room?"

"You're kidding."

"Nope. Seriously."

"Your roommate will be there! It's always there!"

"Trust me. Come to the room."

"Will you try to go out with me?"

"If you must know? Yes."

"I appreciate your honesty. We'll see."

I hug her. She holds a map of the brain with her hands wrapped around me. "And I already have your number," I say.

"You don't get any second chances if you lose them," she says. "I don't give that number twice."

Take a quick look at them as we move away from each other and move to the side.

Joy is next.

"Who's behind you?"

"Huh, who do you think?" answers joy.

"Come together, boys. I will both do both at once. "Wow," says Joey, standing on the side. Joey stands next to him and I start drawing them, their shaggy hair and loose clothes making outlines.

"So - he paints us?" joy asks joy.

"Be quiet, okay?"

"Where are you guys hanging out?" I ask Joey, not looking out of the paper.
"Back when you were garbage heads?"

"What? Will you paint that?"

"No." I'm looking. "I'm just curious. Which neighborhood?"

"It was the lower east side, but don't paint the lower east side," Joey says. "I don't want to go back there."

"Well, fair enough. Where do you want to live? "On the Upper East Side, with all the rich children," answers Joey.

"Huh, me too," Joey says.

"Wait, no, you get a guitar," I say.

"Oh, cool."

I start in Joey's and Joey's brains. With Joy, it's fun to play guitar in a street grid – some country streets meet for the body and then a large wide street for the neck, and a garden for the head. Then I turn to joy. I know the upper east side very well. He's in Knox and the big thing he has is Central Park, so I draw that inside the left of his head. Then I put in a sumptuous network of rich streets. I know

The Guggenheim Museum is somewhere there. I mark it with an arrow and then put an "X" right next to it, in a corner where the apartment probably costs \$20 million, and write a board of Joey. "Pillow of joy! That is right! That's where I'm headed." He raises his arms. "Go ahead." "Enjoy." I hand them the piece.

"Who gets what?" asks joy. "Do you want us to tear it apart?"

"No, boy, we're supposed to keep it together because we're friends," says Joey.
"I'm going to make a copy."

"Where's the camera here?"

"There isn't one! I'll do it when I go out."

"Where would that leave me?"

"With a copy!"

"I don't want a copy!"

"Are you listening to this boy? Nothing good enough for him-"

"Hello, Joey," I interrupt. "Anyway, can I have your phone numbers and Joy's phone numbers to talk to you after you leave?"

Joey starts to say something, but leans over it and blocks it:

"It's not a good idea, Dariez."

"What? Why?"

He sighs. "I've been in and out of this place a lot, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"There are good things about this place. I mean, food is best. There are good kids here... But it's still not a place for children to meet."

"Why not? I met you boys and you are wonderful! "yes, well, all worse, then, when you try to contact me or as a team and you find out we've been shot, we've been shot, we've come back here worse, or we've just disappeared."

"That's a very negative view."

"I've seen it before. You just remember us, okay? We meet in the outside world. It just destroys it. You will be embarrassed by me and by me..." He smiles. "... I may feel embarrassed of me too. And I might be embarrassed by you if you don't keep your stuff together."

"Thanks. Are you sure there are no numbers?"

Joy shakes my hand. "If we need to, we'll meet."

Joy shakes my hand. "What did he say." The last boy in line is My-a Joy.

"I tell you, what to say? You play these numbers - "He'll come to ya!" I answer.

"It's the truth!" he smiles.

Ah, oh delight. What's in my brain? Chaos. I raise his almost bald head and shoulders and then begin to place the most complex and unnecessary land highways through it from ear to ear. I connect them in complex spaghetti stairs. In one bond, five

highways meet. I have to erase and redraw the slopes several times. Then I put in the grid - a grid placed by an overactive designer, with blocks going in all different directions.

When the My-a Joy brain map is completed, it may seem like the best – a catalog of a mind with schizophrenia, but it works somehow.

"There you go," I say to him. He's sitting in a bench that he took next to me to watch me work.

"He'll come to Ya!" he says and takes the map. I want him to finally open up, for Dariez to call me, and tell me that we came together, but he's still My-a Joy - his vocabulary is still limited.

We sit on our chairs. I fall asleep a little. Make art on free of tired. But the last thing I see before I sleep is My-a Joy who reveals his brain map next to me and compares it to Ebony, who says, of course, her map is much nicer. This is not a bad thing to go to sleep.

"Dariez, are you okay?" mom asks. I was shaken and had a momentary seizure that it was all a dream, all that - the entire northern sixth part - but then I wonder, where would the dream begin? If it was a nightmare, it should have started somewhere before, it went wrong. It will be like a dream for a year. You don't have those. And if it's a good dream, it means that I still go back to where it started, leaning on my parents' toilet or lying on the bed listening to my heart. I didn't need to. "Yes! I'm whoa. I'm sitting. All of them are there - dad, mom, Sarah.

"Do you force yourself to sleep?" mom asks. "Are you depressed?"

"Do you take drugs?" asks Sarah. "Can you hear me?"

"I was taking a nap! Gees!

"Oh, okay. It's six o'clock."

"Wow, I was sleeping for a while. I was mapping my mind for kids."

"Oh, boy," says Dad. "That doesn't sound good." "What are brain maps?" asks Sarah.

"That's her art," says mom. "That's why he wants to change schools. Making that art makes you happy, right?

"Yes, do you want to see?"

"Absolutely".

I take the stack from my side and pass it. This is really what I was creating the stack for, I think; to show my parents. "Some of the best were the ones I just did, for the sick," says Dad.

"I love this," says Sarah, pointing to the pig inside that looks like Pittsburgh.

"I devoted a lot of time - in these, I see," says mom.

"Well, here's the thing: they don't take me much time -", I explain. "I'm starting to get a little bored of them, actually. I want to move on to something else." "So how do you feel, Daris?" Dad brings the stack back to the ground.

"You look so much better," says mom.

"And to?"

"Yes," says Sarah. "You don't look as terrible."

"I used to look weird?"

"It doesn't mean weird," my mom tells us both. "It just meant that when I was frustrated, I looked a little under the weather.

Isn't that right, Sarah?

"No, it looked weird."

"Flat effect, that's what doctors call it." Smile. "Well, you don't have that much anymore," says Sarah.

"So - do you want to drop out of school?" dad brings us back to the real deal stuff.

"I don't want to quit." I turn to him. "I want to transfer."

"But that means leaving the school you're currently in."

"He can't handle the other school!" says Sarah. "Look at-"

"Wait a second. I can talk." "Boys". Look at the three in turn. "One thing they do here gives you a lot of time – to think. I can't explain it. Once you enter, time slows down -just-

"Well, you don't have any interruptions, maybe that's it-"

"Also, I think the clocks are a little bit off"

I wave my hand. "The point is that you have time to think about how you got here. Because obviously no one wants to go back. I don't want to go back.'

"Good. Me too," says Dad. What I said last time - about the actual desire to be here. That was a joke."

"That's right. Hey, did you bring the movie?"

"Of course. I can watch some of them with you, right?"

"Absolutely. Anyway, I was thinking when things started to go wrong for me. I realized it started after I got into high school." "Ah, huh," says mom.

"It was the happiest moment of my life. The happiest day. And from there everything was downhill." "True, this happens to a lot of adults," says Dad. "Will you stop interrupting him?" Sarah interrupts. Dad folds his hands behind him and straightens his back.

"It's okay, Sarah. Just me... I think I was focused on getting into pre-executive professionalism because it was a challenge. I wanted to have that feeling of triumph. I never thought about the fact that I would have, you know, to go to school.

"So, you want to do art," says mom.

"Well, let's think about it. I never liked math. I was good at it, but only because I liked having background information in front of me to reach that sense of accomplishment. I never liked English. This - I refer to brain maps - "This is something different. That's something I love. So, I'd better do it.

"You better love her," says Dad. "Because it's a hard life. Artists often end up in places like this."

"Well, then he must be an artist. This is where it is! Sarah says.

"Heh. It's very simple." I'm standing. "Take a look around. I tried to go to the best high school in town.

And that's where I ended up."

"Right." Mom looks behind her. Solomon rushes through our field of vision.

"If I don't make some kind of big change, I'll come out of here wondering how anything is different from before, and I'll end up here."

"Right," says mom. "I'm with you, Dares."

"What art school are you going to?" my father asks. Knox

Academy of Arts? Easy to convert to my grades-'

"Oh, but Dariez, this is the school of the kids who were all spoiled," says Dad.

Look at him. "Yes? My dad? I raise my wrists and show him the bracelets. I'm proud of them now. They are correct, and children cannot nail them. And when you tell the truth you become stronger.

Dad stands still for a minute, looks at his feet, then looks up. "Okay," he says. "We will do everything we have to do.

You have to stay in school until you move, though.

That would be... Until at least the end of the year, I think."

"I'll deal with it," I say.

"I know you will. We will help."

"Dinner, get ready for dinner!" President Armilio walks towards us. "Dares and his family, dinner is almost here!"

"How did you eat?" asks my mother as I stretch my legs.

"I was. That's good."

"It's great, Dariez."

"Okay, I'll leave the DVD here with you." Dad hands it to me. "And I'll come back to watch it when you're done with dinner. When will that be?

"Seven is good. But visiting hours end at eight. You won't be able to watch everything."

"We'll see how long I can stay. You might be surprised."

I swallowed. I don't want him to stay that long.

I'll make sure Polly takes it out.

"I'll see you tomorrow," says mom. "The staff tells us we'll pick you up early in the morning before I go to work." "I'll be ready."

"We have a lot of good food at home."

"I'll see you when I get home from school." Sarah hugs my waist. "I'm very happy to have you back." He patted her head. "Are you embarrassed by this place?"

"Yes, but whatever."

"Me too," I say. "It's just a good kind of embarrassment."

My mom and dad are dressed to get me out. I'm wearing what I have been wearing all the time - here - some khaki pants, my tie-dyed shirt and shoes, and my Rockport shoes, the ones that children have often praised, which made me feel like a professional patient. My mother never attended a change of clothes.

They're here early because dad has to work. He wanted to see me before he left. Mom stays home today to see I'm okay. Then, tomorrow, Friday, I went back to school, but with official notice that I could get into the nurse's office at any time - if I felt depressed. You don't have to go to class for next week. This is school policy. I am encouraged to go but they don't want to confuse me. It's a good deal.

It's 7:45 a.m., I've taken my last vital signs—120/80—standing in the heart of the hall next to the nurses' office, looking at the double doors I came to five days ago. It looks like five days. It doesn't seem too long or too short; it seems that I spent bliss - here I spent. Children always talk about really shocking quotes, really information, really news - but here I think I really got them. Armilio shakes my hand for the last time.

"Good luck, my friend."

Humble says I should stay a little longer.

"You're going to lose it from the outside, boy."

Joy is muttering at me. It's too early for him. The professor tells me to keep doing my art.

Polly says he heard from Neil that I was thinking about volunteering and hopes to see me sometimes.

My-a Joy يتجاهلني تماما.

Ebony says to be wary of liars and cheating and to always respect children.

Joey walks out of her room at 7:50, just like breakfast starts and my parents come out of the nurses' office where they were signing papers. "I'm out in the afternoon," she says. She was wearing sweatpants and a T-shirt. "Call me tonight?" "Absolutely." I touch her number in my pocket, next to her are two notes that I have saved.

"How does it feel?"

"I feel like I can handle it."

"Me too."

"You're a great girl," I say.

"Kind of a fool, but with potential," she says.

"That's all I'm trying to do." "Darry's?" mom asks.

"Oh, boys, ah, that's joy. We have to be friends here." "I saw you last night," says Dad as he shakes her hand.

"Nice to meet you," says mom. Neither takes a second look at the wounds on her face. My parents have some separation.

"Nice to meet you, too," she says.

"Are you still in high school?" my father asks.

"Delphine," she says.

"A lot of pressure, huh," says mom.

"Yes."

"I think they might have to change the whole system. Look, two kids like you, smart kids, sent here because of the pressure."

"Mom".

"I'm serious. I will write to the congressman about this." "Mom".

"I'm going," Joey says. "See you Dares." She dips her leg behind her as she walks away and clicks a wave at me - this is considered a kiss, I think. If my parents weren't here, this would be a kiss.

"Are you ready?" mom asks.

"Yes. Goodbye to all!

"Wait!" from the bottom of the hall, Joey moves forward at the speed he allows himself, which is not very fast, kind of like a brisk walk, and gives me the record.

"Thank you, Dariez. This boy, your son," turns to my father, "He helped me."

"Thank you," says mom and dad.

I hug Joey and absorb his smell one last time.

"Good luck, boy."

"As you go on in life, you think about me and hope that
I prefer."

"I will."

We break up and Joey migrates towards the dining room and smells of food.

Look at my father. "Let's go."

It's incredibly simple. The nurses open the doors for us and there I'm outside, looking at the "Sh-h! Healing in Progress" poster I saw when I walked in. The bank of the elevators stands in front of us guarding.

"Girls," I tell them. "Can you go home yourselves, and I'll walk behind you in a minute?"

"Why? Are you okay?"

"I just want to walk alone a little bit."

"Think about things?"

Continued: 2

"Yes."

"You don't feel... Bad?"

"No, I just want to walk home."

"We'll take your stuff." They hold the bag of old clothes and the art that was with me, as well as the record. wave, take the next elevator down.

I wait for thirty seconds before I press the button.

I'm not the best, you know. The weight did not leave my head. I feel how easy it is to fall into it, lie down and not eat, waste my time - damn wasting my joy -, look at my homework and panic and go and relax at Christopher, look at Emma and get jealous again, take the subway home and hope he had an accident, go get my bike and head to Kinzoa Bridge. It's all still there. The only thing is that it is not an option now. It's just... A probability like the probability that I will turn to dust the next moment and be spread throughout the universe as an omniscient consciousness. It's not a very likely possibility.

I ride the elevator. It is large and shiny. There's a lot to look at in the real world.

I don't know what I'm going to do today, still. Maybe I'll go home, tidy up my technician, then call everyone I know and tell them I'm going to change schools and from now on they should get in touch with me by phone instead of email.

But I may also go to the park - how can I never go to the park?

... And throw the ball around with any kids there. Or Frisbee. It's a real day out. There's actual weather there.

I walk in the hallway. Odors! Coffee, cakes, flowers and scented candles from the gift shop. Why does UMPC Hospital have a gift shop? I think everyone should have a gift shop.

Go out to the sidewalk.

I am a free boy. Well, I'm a minor, but a quarter of your life you spend as a minor. You can also get the most out of it. I am a free minor.

I'm breathing. It's a spring day. The air is like a leaf rising on me in slow motion.

Try to draw a naked person. Try to draw joy naked. Travel.

Fly. Swim. Meet. Love. Dance. Win. He gave a big smile. Laugh. Hold. Walk.

Skip. Well, he's gay, whatever, skip.

Skiing on skis. Play basketball. Jog. He ran off. He ran off. He ran off. Run home.

Run home and enjoy it. Enjoy. Take these actions and enjoy them.

It's yours, Dariez. You deserve it because you chose it.

You could have left them all behind, but you chose to stay here.

So far live real, Dariez. Live. Live. Live. Live.

Live.

"What's up, son? Did you enter?!"

"Yes."

"Allriiiiiight! "

'Hooo'

"Piach!"

"That's right!"

"But you studied. I didn't study at all."

'Right. I should feel lucky to talk to you. You're kind of like Hercules.

"Yes, cleaning the stables. I'm having a party."

"When? Evening?"

"Yes. My parents are far away. I have the whole house. You're coming, right?"

"A real party? No cake?"

"Absolutely".

"Sure!" I was in eighth grade and I had entered high school and was going to a party? I have been set for life! "Can you bring any wine?"

"Like drinks?"

"Dariez, come on. Yes. Can you bring it?"

"I don't have an ID card."

"Darry's, none of us have an identity! I mean, can you take off some of your parents?"

"I don't think they have any..." But I knew this wasn't true.

"They have something."

I put my hand on my cell, so my mother wouldn't hear.

"Scotch. They have a scotch bottle."

"What kind?"

"Jeez, dude, I don't know."

"Okay, bring it. Can you call any girls?"

I was in my room studying for a year. "Nope."

"It's okay, I'll bring the girls. Do you want to help me at least set up?"

"Absolutely!"

"Come here."

"I'm going to Christopher's house!" I declared to my mom, flipping my phone off. I still had the welcome pack in my hand. I gave it to her to put in my room. "What are you going to do there?" she asked, cheering at the package, then at me.

"Um... Sleep".

"Are you going to celebrate? Because you should celebrate it."

"Heh. Yes."

"Darry's, I'm honest, I've never seen someone who works as hard as I did at this school. You deserve a little break and deserve to feel proud of yourself. You are talented, and the world is paying attention. This is the first step in an amazing journey-"

"Okay, mom, please." I hugged her.

I grabbed my coat and sat at the kitchen table, pretending to text on the phone. When mom left the room, she invaded the closet above the sink, took out one bottle of scotch (Glenlivet), and brought from the back of the closet the thermos I used to use for elementary school lunches. That might look great at the party. I poured some scotch and put a little water back into the scotch, in case they checked the levels, stuffed the thermos into my big jacket pocket before leaving the house and calling my mom who I'll call later.

I took the subway to Christopher without a book to study on my lap - for the first time - in a year. At his stop, I climbed the stairs to the gray streets, slid into his building, nodded to the doorman to call, and crushed my thumb on the elevator button, giving him a touch and some flair. On the sixteenth floor was Christopher, holding his front door open, rapping about killing children in the background, holding his metal cigarette for me.

"Smoke. Celebrate." Stopped.

"If anything is the joy of time, it's now." I nodded.

"Come on, I'll show you." Christopher brought me to his house, sat me on his couch and showed me how to hold a cigarette, so that the metal would not burn me. Explain how you should take the smoke to your lungs, not your stomach – "Don't swallow it, Dariez, that's how the blows get lost" – and how to let it pass as slowly as possible through your mouth or nose. The key was to hold it for as long as possible. But you didn't want to keep it for a long time.

Then I coughed.

"How do I light it?" she asked.

"I'll light it for you," Christopher was like. He knelt in front of me on the couch—I glanced at his living room, fenced off by floor-to-ceiling bookshelves, filled with a coffee table, a long grooved ashtray, ceramics, and a small electric piano—trying to remember how everything looked if it changed later. The only thing I did – which the kids said was kind of like a smoking pot – was really the hammocks, and Christopher told me that anyone who said that was probably high when they were on the hammocks.

The flame of butane rose.

I sucked the metal cigarette as if the doctor was asking me to.

My mouth was filled with the bait I knew so well from Christopher's room—a chemical, buzzing, and mild taste. I looked him in the eye with my cheeks bulging. He cut the flame smiling.

"Not in your cheeks!" il dit. "You look like Daisy Gillespie!

In your lungs! Put it in your lungs."

I worked with new muscles. The smoke inside me looked like a lump of mud.

"That's it, hold it, hold it..."

My eyes began to water, and they became hot.

"Hold it. Hold it. Want more?"

I shook my head in horror. Christopher laughed.

"Okay. Dude, you're good. You're good, dude! Pffv She blew everything up in Christopher's face.

"Jesus! Boy, that was great! Christopher hit the cloud that came out of me. "Are you sure you've never done this before?"

I was gasping, breathing in the air that still contained smoke.

"What's going to happen?" she asked.

"Probably nothing." Christopher stood up, put his cigarette back, and put it in the stand ashtray. Then he stretched his hand down - I expected a handshake, but he pulled me out of the couch.

"Congratulations."

We hugged mouth to ear. It was a boy's hug, complete with slapping. I leaned back and smiled at him as I grabbed his arms.

"You too, boy. It's going to be great."

"I'm telling you what's going to be great: this party," Christopher said, and began to walk fast, counting on his fingers. "I need you to go and get some soft drinks, for nebulizers. Also, we have to put all my father's books and writings away so that they are not damaged. Also, call this girl. Her father threatened to call the police if she called again. Say you're with Greenpeace."

"I won't remember this. Wait," I said, and took an index card from Christopher's coffee table. I was numbering them with my mustache, from one, when the weeds hit me.

"Whoa-Wow".

"Oh," Christopher said. He looked up.

"Whoa." "Do you feel it?"

Does my mind fall out of my head? I thought.

I looked down at the index card that says 1) get the Seltzer, and 1) get the twisted Seltzer back as if she decided to drop off the card. I looked at Christopher's bookshelves and looked similar, but when I turned around, she moved in frames. It wasn't like the slowness that came from being underwater. It was as if I was under the thick air and heavy air that decided to follow me. Being high, I felt very heavy.

"Do you feel it?" Christopher repeated.

I looked at his standing ashtray, filled with curly cigarettes and a clear, shiny metal cigarette.

"He's like the king of cigarette butts!" J'ai dit.

"Oh, boy," Christopher was like. "Dares - will you be able to do things for the party?"

Were you? I was able to do anything. Here I was making clever phrases like "king of cigarette butts"; if I went out, there was nothing to tell me what I would be able to.

"What is the first?" she asked.

Christopher gave me a few dollars to get the sparkling drink, but as I opened the door out into the world, his bell rang.

"It's Emma," Christopher said, hopping into the closed-circuit phone in his kitchen, which was full of grapefruit and dark wooden cabinets.

"She's coming?" she asked.

Emma was on our side. She was half Chinese, half Jewish. She was well dressed. Every day she would come up with something different - a series of SpongeBob Burger King games hanging around her neck. One asymmetrical, gigantic, red plastic hoop earring; Black clown circles on her cheeks. I think her accessories were a compliment meant to distract attention from her lucrative little body and doll face. If she let everything become normal, if she let her hair swing the way she would if she grew up in a field with the wind, she would make all the boys explode.

"Emma is so hot, huh," Christopher said, hang up the phone.

"She's fine."

We sat watching the door as if we were waiting for the mother's bird to bring us food. Knocked.

"Hey," Christopher called, and he hit me.

"Hello!" J'ai dit. We rushed to the door handle. Christopher took a look, pulled her towards him, and there she wore a green dress with a rainbow of mysterious anklets on one leg. Her eyes were so big and dark that she looked smaller and more flirtatious, on a high-heeled shoe he threw her forward towards us and made her dress define her little breasts.

"Boys," she said. "I think someone was smoking pah-at."

"No way," Christopher said.

"My friends are coming. When does the party start?"

"Five minutes ago," Christopher said. "Do you want to play Scrabble?"

"Scrabble!" Emma put her bag in the shape of a hippopotamus. "Who plays scribble?"

"Well, I do, doh, and Darry's does it too" - I didn't, actually - and we, some smart boys, see that we have entered.

"I heard!" Emma grabbed the hippopotamus bag and hit Christopher with it. "I did it too!" as an afterthought, it hit me.

"Congratulations!"

"Group hug!" Christopher declared, and we got together, Emma's triangular tiered head came to my chin. My head reached Christopher's chin. I put my hand around Emma's waist and felt her warmth and how tight she was. Her palm curled around my shoulders. We pushed our stumps together in a kind of ballet. I could feel Emma's breath between us. I turned to look-

"Scribble," Christopher said. He went through the living room, taking it out of one of the bookshelves. He put it on the floor and we sat down, Christopher between me and Emma, the ashtray takes fourth place.

"House rules," Christopher said as he flipped the tiles. "If you don't have any words to put on the board, you can form a word, as long as you have an actual definition of that word in your head. If your definition makes other kids laugh, you'll get points, but otherwise, you lose ~Sped~ points.

"We can make up words?" she asked. This was full of possibilities. I can make up Emmahed – what happens when Emmah touches you, you get Emma. That would make her laugh. Or not.

"What about Chinese words?" asked Emma.

"You have to know what it means and be able to explain it."

"Oh. This shouldn't be a problem." She smiled fiercely.

"Who's going first?"

"Can we smoke?"

"So, decryption." Christopher gave her the metal cigarette - I said no this time -. I had enough.

For her first word, Emma laid out Molly.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Chinese word".

"What does that mean?"

"Ah, cat."

"This is ridiculous. How do we know if Molly is real? He turned to Christopher.

He shrugged. "The benefit of doubt?"

Emma stuck her tongue out at me and she had a nice tongue. Is that a ring? I thought - it could not be. Wait - he's gone.

"I swear," she said. "Come here, little mule!" you see? "I'm checking you on the next time," I said.

"The Internet is there." Christopher was like.

"But while you're gone, we'll give you all the consonants." Emma smiled.

"Is this my go?" I put the mop off Molly. Ten points.

Christopher put SMAP off the MOP. "This is a cross between a slap and a slap. Like, "I - picked you up." Emma laughed and laughed. I laughed even though I didn't want to.

Christopher earned the points. Emma put down the trail.

"What is it?" she asked.

"It's exciting, you know, like a trail on a flute, except for the first lowercase L and the second in capital letters!"

"This is not ataxia, this is a "tree snake"!"

"Okay, good." she switched letters. Now T. Re told me.

"Trail-E! What is Trail He?"

"An act that cannot be mentioned."

Christopher laughed so hard that he just had to loosen his body into Emma's body, leaning on her shoulder. She pushed back, tilting her wing to him.

I saw where this is headed. She made eye contact with Emma and here's what her eyes said: Dariez, we're all headed to the same school. I'm going to need a friend to come in, to give me some stability, a bit of backup, you know?

Nothing serious. You're great, but you're not as great as Christopher. He has a pot and he is more relaxed than you. I spent last year studying for this test; he didn't lift a finger for it.

This means that he is smarter than you. Not that you are not smart, but intelligence is very important in a boy - it is the most important thing, there is a sense of humor. And he has a better sense of humor than you too. It doesn't hurt that it's longer. So, I'll be your friend, but for now let's let this evolve. And don't be jealous.

That would be a waste of everyone's joy.

We kept playing. Christopher and Emma approached until I touched their knees, and I couldn't help but imagine the energy that was passing through those knees. I thought they would probably be inclined to get a first kiss (or a second? no, Christopher was going to tell me) right in front of me when the bell rang again.

Cookie was Emma's friend. She had brought beer bottles.

It took us ten minutes to open it, and eventually we hit it on the edge of Christopher's kitchen top, to work on the tops. Emma then said Cookie should have had fluctuations, asked about fluctuations, and we all laughed. Cookie had blonde hair and luster all over her neck. She hadn't been in pre-executive career, but that was good because she was going to high school in Canada. The boy in the local bodega allowed her to buy beer if she bent over the counter - she developed early and had the kind of huge attractive breasts that moved in reverse rhythm when she walked.

We put the scribble away - no one won. Rap music seems to be associated with some kind of playlist capable of the Internet and has continued to work, never repeated, as more and more guests arrive. There was Anna - she was taking Ritalin and smelling it from her small cosmetic mirror before the tests. Paul - Ranked nationally in Halo 2 and trained five hours a day with his "team" in Seattle (he would have put him on college applications ;) Mika - His father was higher on the taxi and limousine commission and had the kind of badge that allowed him to get a free taxi ride anywhere, anything. The children began to appear who I had no idea who they were, as a plump white kid wearing an Eight Ball jacket—that would tell my future—to anyone who looked at me, and who announced, coming, was so popular in 1990 that you'd get a knife just for having it and no one like him had booze.

Inexplicably, someone came up in a batboy mask. It was called Racing.

A short, feisty, mustache kid named Richard came with a backpack full of pot and set up a shop in the living room.

A girl with hemp bracelets in different subtle shades announced that we had to listen to 40 ounces of Sublime to Freedom, and when Christopher refused to wear them, she began to spin and put what she claimed to be Satan's curse on him, saying,

Diablo Tantonka points her fingers in fake horns: "Fffffffft!

Vvvvt!

I smoked more pot. The party was like a movie - it should have been a movie. It was the best movie I've ever seen - nowhere else I got shattered glasses, a kid trying to dance in the living room, a dictionary thrown at a cockroach, a kid holding his head in the freezer and saying it could make you high, orange vomiting spreading in a semicircle in the kitchen sink, kids screaming from windows that "school sucks," rap proclaiming "I want to drink beer and smoke some," and a poor soul smelling Pixie Stik. , and then penetrates the purple dust into the toilet ...?

Place.

I haven't processed anything, but something seismic is happening inside me. I feel my body wrapped and slapped over my spine. I feel the heart beating early in the morning on Saturday and telling me I don't want to die. I feel the lungs that were doing their work quietly inside the hospital. Feel the hands that can make art and touch girls - think about all your gains. I feel like feet that can let me run anywhere I want, to and out of the park all the way to my bike to go around Knox and Knox too, once my mom is convinced. I feel my stomach, liver and all those soft stuff out there to handle food, I'm happy to get back in use. But most of all I feel my mind, there it takes blood and looks at the world and notices humor and light and smells and dogs and everything else in the world - everything in my life is everything in my mind so it will be normal that when my mind is tight, it will be everything in my life.

I feel my mind above my spine and I feel it turning slightly to the left.

That's it - it happens in my brain as soon as the rest of my body moves. I don't know where my mind went. I came out of kilter somewhere. She got stuck in some nonsense that she couldn't handle. But now he's back hooked up to the spine and ready to take over.

Jeez, why was I trying to kill? It's a huge thing, this transformation, as big as I imagined. My mind doesn't want to think anymore. Suddenly he wants to do.

He ran off. Eat. Drink. Eat more. Do not vomit. Instead, take a piss. Then take crap. Wipe your ass. Make a phone call. Open the door. Ride your bike. Ride in a car. Ride on the subway. Talk. Talk to children. Read. Read maps. Make maps. Make art. Talk about your art. Sell your art. Take a test. Get into school. Celebrate. Have a party. Write a thank you letter to someone. A hug from your mother. Kiss your father.

Kiss your little sister. Make with joy. Make more with it. Touch it. Hold her hand. Take it out somewhere. Meet her friends. Dilapidated on the street with her. Take her for a walk. Eat with her. Watch a movie with her. Watch a movie with Christopher. Heck, watch a movie with Emma, once you're quiet with her. Get calm with more kids. Drink coffee in small coffee drinking areas. Tell the kids your story. Volunteer. Count to six North. Enter as a volunteer and say hello to everyone who waited for you as a patient. Help children. Help kids like Joey. Get the children's books and music they want when they're there. Help kids like Joey. Show them how to draw. Draw more.

Try to draw a landscape. Try to draw a person.

Blade II... Well, you have to love action movies to love them. I'm a big fan of action movies. They're like a blues. There is a certain formula. You have the hero, the villain and the girl. The hero will die almost but not completely, and if he is there it will be the same story with him. There will be one subvillain with a characteristic facial characteristic, and he will be killed in a printing press or pool.

The plot of Blade II is that Blade is a boy running around killing vampires. He wears a leather coat with a sword stuck to his back. He regularly walks around with this thing. I think it's possible like – to walk around a city with a sword and not notice the kids, but the chances of not cutting your ass seem close to zero, especially if you're running or doing jumping twists.

Now, real kicking is how vampires die. It digitally dissolves into multi-colored ash in slow motion. I could watch these vampires die all day. It's very clean the way they go. They don't leave a corpse or anything.

I explain all this to Humble as we help Monieec roll out the TV from the activity center and plug it in. Monieec has no idea how to use the DVD - the whole shiny metal disc concept scares her. We enter it and have to hit the TV with some things to start it on, but then it explodes in our eyes: Blade kills the first group of vampires in Prague by sliding on escape from the fire, jumping over motorcycles, and stabbing men with his sword.

The audience is a good cross section of six north - modest, time, joyful. Professor; The new boy is a mother-being. Becca and Dad. He came at seven and sat in

the corner, stayed very calm, blended. My-a Joy came as soon as he heard the noise of the movie and sat next to him.

"Hello," said Dad.

"Your son?" asked Mai A. Joey, pointing to me.

"Yes."

"How sweet!"

Dad nodded and said, "Yes, yes – it is."

On the screen, Blade cuts a vampire from his thigh to his skull.

"Whoa, that's brutal," Humble says. "Did you see that?"

That's worse than gonorrhea, boy."

"Have you ever had gonorrhea?"

"Please. I've got it all. You know what they say: the Jews cut them off, and the Irish wear them. "Ewe," I say.

"You're Irish?" "Half," says modest.

"Can you be calm? I'm trying to watch the movie," says the professor.

"Oh, don't start. You don't care about this movie. Carrie Grant isn't in it," Humble says.

"Carrie Grant was a real boy. Don't you say anything about it?"

"I can say whatever-"

"What is this boy doing?" asks joy.

"He's sucking that girl's blood, don't you see?"

"I thought she was a vampire, though."

"So? Vampires have blood." "Vampires have no blood," says Um-Being. "Vampires have nothing but green running in their veins, and green means money."

"You don't know what you're talking about," Humble says. "If you drink blood, how come you won't have blood?"

"I met the vampire Lotta in my time, and their blood was always green. They were sucking me dry in their small temples.

"What temples?" asks Becca. "I go to the temple. It's better not to talk about Jewish children."

"I'm also Jewish," the professor says. That's why they tried to cram my house."

Joey walks towards the TV from the bottom of the hall, dressed in a long black skirt and a white blouse with a small frill around the shoulders, and closes her eyes with me. Look around. No seat for her.

Dad notices as soon as they become visible. He leans over and gives me a look:

So, is that why you feel better, son?

I shrugged my shoulders.

She comes to me. "There is nowhere to sit." "Here!" I stand and point to my armrest. She sits in the middle of the chair. "Oh, you heated it! Thank you."

"No, I meant - where am I going to sit?" she patted the armrest.

"Darn, girl."

I sit down, watching Blade cut more vampires. Topics discussed among the public include surgery, moon, chickens, prostitution, and jobs in the sanitation department. Dad leans back and lets his eyes fall. I had a feeling that it was going to happen.

As soon as I see him breathing heavily and steadily, I wake up, go to Polly, and tell him that it is after eight o'clock.

"Do you want me to fire your father?" he asks.

"I need to be independent," he says. "Okay." Polly is walking in the hall with me. "Mr. Gellner - I'm sorry. Visiting hours are over."

"Oh, hmm!" he wakes up. "That's right. So, Darry's, you're going to bring this back tomorrow?"

"Yes," I tell him. "Thanks."

"Thank you for getting here and getting help." Polly retreats. It's a big, long, hug right in front of the TV, but no one says anything.

"I love you," he mumbled. "Even though I'm a teenager and I'm not supposed to do that."

"I love you too," says Dad. "Although... What... No - I don't have any jokes about it. I just do."

We broke up and shook hands as he made his way into the hall, waving without looking back.

"Goodbye Mr. Gellner!" is a chorus of those who care calling.

I dive beside Joey, whispering in her ear. "This is one. I have to settle on something else, and then I'll see you in my room."

"Okay."

I walk through the hall and enter my room, where Joey lays his distinctive form in bed, and heads towards the window, in his constant dead veneration.

"Joy?"

"Yes."

"Do you remember how I wanted Italian music?"

"Yes, Dariez."

"I got some for you."

"Did you?" he pulls his top sheet aside. "Where?"

"I got a record," I say. "You know we're watching a movie, right?"

"Yes, I hear. That sounds very violent, not good for me."

"Well, well, in the other hall, where the smoking area is, I asked Polly to put on Italian music."

"And did this thing?"

"He's ready to keep going now. Do you want to hear? "Oi". Joy pushes sheets aside in a gesture of hope, strength and determination. It is difficult to get out of bed. I know it. You can lie there for an hour and a half without thinking about anything, just worry about what the day has in store and know that you will not be able to cope with it. And Joey did it for years. He did this until he needed to be hospitalized. And now he wakes up.

Not for good, but for real.

Walking with him out of the room, I passed Polly at the nurses' station and nodded my head to him. He opens a door behind his desk and enters to play the turntables, changes PA music from ordinary, funky FM to deep string sounds, rolls over them, a sound of dangerous clarity and longing, hits three ascending notes and then bends one beyond where I thought you couldn't bend the sound of a mother, sounds like a boy pulled and slapped to shake slightly.

"um Kulthum!" says Farah.

"Yes! Ah... Who is this?

"This is the greatest singer in Italy!" he shouts. "How do you find this?"

"I have a friend whose father has some records."

"This I haven't heard in a long time!" he smiles so much that I think his glasses will fall off.

Armilio plays solitaire at the back of the hall, next to the smoking hall. "You're out of your room, buddy? Que se passe-t-il? Is there a fire?

"This music!" joy indicates that. "That's Italian!"

"You're Italian, my friend?"

"Yes."

"I'm from Greece."

"The Greeks, they took all our music."

"This?" Armilio looks up. "That's not like Greek music, buddy."

"Do you want to sit down, Joey?" I ask. He looks around, and then to the music.

"The best seat would be here, right next to the speaker." "Yes," he says, and sits down.

"I don't like this," Armelio looks.

"What kind of music do you like, Armelio?" I ask.

"Techno".

"Just... Techno?

"نعم. Leave it. هكذا".

"Heh." Joy laughs. "The Greek boy is funny."

"Of course, I'm funny, my friend! I'm always funny! You just don't leave your room. Do you want to play cards? Joy begins to leave. I stand on top of him and raise my hands. "Wait a second, boy. I know you can't play cards for money, but Armilio doesn't play for money.

"That's what I know. I don't want to play."

"Are you sure? He doesn't have anyone else to play with." "That's right. My friends are all watching this stupid movie. Do you want to play spades? I'll crush you in spades.

"Joy," I say. He still looks at me, his hands on his armrests, ready to go. "Remember when you saved me from that girl?"

"Yes."

"I'm trying to do the same for you now, to get you out of your room and save you. S'il vous plaît. Play with Armilio".

He looks at me, then at the speakers.

"That's what I'm doing for you, Dariez. But just for you. And just because of the music."

"Wow." He patted him on the back. "Go easily with him, Armelio."

"You know this won't happen, buddy!" I smile and walk through the hall, waving to them. As soon as I get to the corner, I run - I don't have much joy at the moment of time - but I skate at a relaxed pace by Paullie and then move as slowly and quietly as possible, entering my room. Joey picked up what was happening: she was already there, sitting on my bed, looking out the window.

"You're so cunning," she whispers. I shrugged my shoulders. "Come sit down. It is a beautiful view through your curtains.

I sit next to joy and it starts immediately, as if destined for it - although I do not believe in fate. I just believe in biology and heat, and I want girls. There has been so much hesitation in boyish parts of my life that it's shocking that there isn't anything here, just to lean back and open this girl's mouth over mine, to relax her and touch her face and feel the wounds there but understanding, not panicking, just moving my hand to her neck, which is clean and smooth, she hits my pillow and I'm next to her with my legs off the bed, she's still on the floor like I'm sitting in class like my lower half He had no role in this. Kissing.

"You're beautiful," I stop and tell her.

"Shh, they will hear."

She has her hand in my hair and it reminds me that my hand has to do something right now, they just kind of touch her neck while trying to figure out what's more attractive than Emma. It's her tongue, I think it's a completely different creature than Emma's. Emma was small and capricious. Joey is overwhelming - it slides inside and almost fills me. It's like a deep dark part of it that came out of it, and no one else can reach it. She squeezes it through my teeth and keeps my eyes open, even though there is nothing in the room but the scattered moonlight to see. We squeeze each other as if we have prizes in the back of our mouths and can only take them out with the tips of our tongues.

It's freakin rocks.

I put my hand on its white top and it doesn't stop me, at all, and here they are, straight through the soft fabric - one on each side, that's so cool - my palms envelop them and then rise from them and then envelop again. I'm not sure what to do with them. She's bigger than Emma. They fill my hands. Should I squeeze them? I'm trying it. I'm looking. She nods her head. I squeeze them again, everything, all at once, and I move my mouth under her chin to her neck, and kiss the underside of it where the Adam's apple will be, only this is a real girl.

Her hips moved against me. Not her hips, her crotch - I mean, that's a crutch, right? Girls have a crotch ...? Or do they have a nicer name for them? Wow, how far will this go?

She squeezes it - whatever it is on my thigh. My feet have somehow risen and now I'm horizontally on the bed next to them, my hands pressing them and my shoes - my Rockport shoes hitting each other.

Say nothing. Everything touching.

"Do you want me to?" I ask.

She nodded. Or maybe she shakes her head. I do not know. But I take two fingers from my right hand and put them through the soft seam at the top of it. Under it is a bra, I'm sure something is made of mesh that wraps around it. I'm messing with my finger against her, not sure if she can feel it. Can you feel things through a bra?

They make sounds like someone is about to sneeze. When I squeeze her breasts, she makes more. When I move the side of the bra, it doesn't make any of it. So, I put my fingers through her shirt and felt the bra collar - the highest point on it.

An inch and a half above sea level.

"Wait." Joey lifts her ass off the bed and inserts her hands, flat, palm, down herself. Now she has no hands. She wasn't doing anything with them anyway, but that's weird. "Keep going," she says.

"Okay," I move my fingers, still outside her bra, around her nipple. I decided to try something. I get the nipple directly between the joints on the index finger and middle finger, squeeze.

You can't get a lot of pressure through the bra, but the noise is immediate.

"En e".

"Um?" I look.

"Mm-mummy".

Oh, that's great.

"ش-ه" ، "سيأتي باولي" ، "أهمس".

"How much joy do we have?" she asks.

"I don't know. A little bit."

"You're going to call me, right? When you're out? And are we going to hang out?"

"I want to go out with you," he says. "I do."

"That's what I mean. We will." Smile. "Where am I going to tell the children, I met you?"

"In the psychiatric hospital. Then they won't ask any questions."

She laughs, a real giggle. Now we have kind of lost the sexual nature of things. Can I get it back just by pressing? It's worth shooting.

"mm-mm".

Well, cool, just now there's another voice that wants me to do something else. It's the same voice that got me connected with Emma. He's the voice of my lower half, but he sounds more honest now, and he knows he can't get away with everything he wants to do, but insists that we try something.

We need to test Christopher's claim.

My hand moves down Joey's real body, down the line of the ruffled white shirt to the skirt, which has a slightly different bead than the fabric. I come down to her end, from her knees, shocked that I don't get any resistance, hesitation, or punches in the face. I twist the skirt - I really risk putting a hole in this bed at this point and there I find underwear. No underwear. Pants.

Real panties!

Holy crap, I'll find out!

"Wow!"

Gasps of joy.

"It's like inside the cheek!"

"What?"

Joy pushes me away from her. The position of the bulging seam of the shirt is changed, the panties are again flicked into place. The skirt is down and the girl is at the head of the bed, staring at me.

"What did you say about my cheek?"

"No, no, shh" not your cheeks, um... I was... Your other cheeks."

"My butt cheeks?" she pulls her hair onto her real cheeks, holding it there, her eyes wide and angry in the moonlight.

"No," I whisper. Then he sighed. "Let me explain. Do you want me to explain?"

"Yes!"

"Okay, but that's like the information of a super boy. I'm just telling you because we're going to hang out when we get out of here.

"Maybe we're not equal. What did you say about my cheek?"

"No, listen, it has nothing to do with your cheeks and wounds, okay?"

"What does that have to do with that?"

I tell her.

When I'm done, there's an awesome pregnant pause, a pause that can carry all the hate, screaming and screaming in the world as well as the possibility of being discovered as another girl in my room (how did I get two?

Cycling, to not being able to eat, move, wake up, and end up like Joy or Joy – or not remembering joy or thinking that you are one. Individual moments always have the probability of complete failure. But it also has the possibility to say beautiful girl-

"This is the stupidest thing I've ever heard."

-And-

To put her finger in her mouth to test it.

Squats here.

"What?" she asks, mouth clogged. "I don't understand that. I don't feel the same at all."

I'm backing down. "You're so cool." Look at it. "How did you become so cool?"

"Please," she says. "We got to go. The film is almost over."

I hug her again and drag her to bed. And in my mind, I get out of bed and look at us, look at everyone else in this hospital who might be lucky to carry a beautiful girl now, then in the whole Knox block, then the neighborhood, then Knox, then the Clarion counties, then the entire three-state area, then this little corner of America - with laser eyes I can see in every house - then the whole country and the hemisphere and now the whole stupid world, everyone in every Bed, sofa, futon, chair, swing, love seat, tent, everyone kissing or touching each other... I know I'm happier than them all.

Christopher and Emma spoke on the couch. I took my thermos from Scotch - just to get something in my hand. I didn't open it - and watched as they moved, swaying towards each other and moving away from each other in increments that I doubt they recognized. They stopped becoming children in my eyes. They turned directly into male and female sexual organs on a collision course.

"What's going on, son?" asked Richard. Richard hadn't gotten his first piece of jewelry yet. He was in a state of larvae. "Do you enjoy yourself?"

I enjoyed everything except Christopher and Emma. and scotch. I wanted him to think I was enjoying scotch, at least.

"Do you like these things?" I asked, open my thermos.

"What is it?" inhale. "yes, dude, that's hardcore. You have to sip it."

I put it on my lips. I didn't grasp anything, just let him run against me and I felt how hot it was. He was cutting evil, and the bitter smell-

Richard pushed the thermos into my mouth.

"Sip!"

"Dude!" I stepped back as Scotch littered my shirt. It felt lighter, more gentle and warmer than water. "You are such a penis!" "Pause!" ran across the room and punched this baby Asin, told him he had his mother, and threw a pillow at Christopher and Emma, who were now lip-attached on the couch.

I wasn't angry that it happened. I was angry because I missed how it happened. I didn't see him leaning or she. I wanted to know for the future, for some girls who were not wanted. But now at least I got an offer. I got to see how Christopher moved his hands. He put his right hand on her face repeatedly, gently, while his left slipped around her side and grabbed her little back more firmly. His hands were playing the role of a good cop, a bad cop.

There was still some scotch in the thermos. I drank from it.

The bait hasn't bothered me since Richard's push.

"I didn't know you drank, Darry's!" was the voice behind me. Julie, who always wore sports pants with Nice Try written on it in an arc on her butt cheeks, rumbles beer against my thermos.

"I don't, really," I was like.

"I thought you would be busy studying. I heard you went to school. What are you going to do now?"

"Go there."

"No, I mean with you, Joey."

I shrugged my shoulders. "I'm going to work hard at school, get good grades, go to a good college, and get a good job."

"It was crazy how much I studied. You always had these cards."

I looked at the scotch. The esophagus was burning, but I took more.

"Did you see Christopher and Emma come out? They're so cute!"

"They're making?" I was shocked.

"Yes, haven't you seen?"

"I saw them tie," she explained, looking at them from the kitchen. "I didn't think they were having sex."

"They are not!"

"I thought going out was having sex."

"Jeez, Darry's, no. Making is making."

"Is this the same as delivery?"

"Well, linking can mean sex. I was confused."

Christopher and Emma were fully busy now. One of his hands was hidden, exploring magical places in beige.

"You should put it on one of your cards." "Heh." She gave a big smile.

Julie took a step towards me. "I want to go out with someone now."

"Oh, cool."

"I've been looking and looking for someone." "Um..." I looked at her. Her short blonde hair framed a slightly wide face at the bottom, serrated, and somewhat red everywhere. I didn't want to communicate with her, go out with her, or anything else. The person I wanted was ten feet away. This would be my first kiss if it was offered to me. Girls liked to say that they want to connect with "someone" when it's anyone but you. Julie tilted her head up, her eyes closed. I looked at her lips, trying to make me kiss them, but I stopped. For my first kiss, I didn't want to settle down. Julie opened her eyes.

"Are you okay, boy?"

"Yes, yes, just me..." When - I'm drunk and stoned, Julie. Give me a break. "It's okay." She left the room, and soon after, the party. I hurt her feelings, she found out later. I didn't know I had that power.

I walked around to the laptop that was supplying music to the stereo. Next to him was Christopher's father's record set, placed on a bookshelf, from old vinyl records. Suddenly I needed some separate information to put in my brain, to get out what was there, so I pulled a log. Led Zeppelin III.

It was large—the size of a laptop—and the cover was a whirlpool of images: male heads with lots of hair, rainbows, balloons (I guessed those were Zeppelin), flowers and teeth. I hung the edge of the log slightly, like a tab on a five-topic notebook, and held it experimentally. She turned around, and when she turned, the whole circle turned inward, and the images that appeared through small holes changed: rainbows into stars,

airships into planes, flowers into dragonflies. It was awesome. One of the icons that popped up looked just like Q-Bert levels, one of the best old video games – I didn't realize that Led Zeppelin had invented Q-Bert!

I looked up at Christopher and Emma was still at it. Now he put his hand in her hair and was pulling it towards him like a gas mask. I raised the album to hide their heads. Hey.

I dropped the album. Christopher and Emma. I grabbed him.

More photos. It was as if they were part of it.

The house is filled. The children began to stand in line to go to one of Christopher's bookcases. They weren't making or anything - a kid named John announced that he had sprayed pepper spray there and the kids would come in to see if they could handle it.

The boys and a few girls stumbled at the exit "Aggg, my eyes!" and tears, running in search of water, but this did not stop those who lined up behind them. It looked like everyone at the party went except me.

I looked at more albums, like the White Beatles, which I never knew was white, and each time - I looked up, Christopher and Emma were in a deeper entanglement. Suddenly I felt sleepy and warm, from Scotch I think, and leaned on the pile of album, just trying to rest my eyes for a minute. When she woke up, she instinctively looked at Christopher and Emma. They disappeared. I ran from behind my resting place and looked at the clock above the TV. Somehow it was 2:07 am, the house had weakened.

God. I got up. The laptop playlist has stopped. My night is over. All I did was look at the records and almost communicate with a girl, but somehow, I felt accomplished.

"Ah, Richard?" she asked.

Richard was playing a PlayStation on Christopher's couch. The PlayStation cord stretched across the room. He looked up.

"What?"

"Where is everyone?"

"Having sex with your mother."

Next, to Richard, a girl named Donna was placed in a block on one end of the sofa. The boy in the eight-ball jacket occupied a chair. Someone shouted to put more

music. Richard shouted to shut up, son. The house was full of mugs and mugs everywhere as if they were multiplying during the party.

"Does anyone know where Christopher is?"

"Pause", it was all that Richard could travel to.

"Christopher!"

"Shut up, boy! He's with his chick."

"I'm here, I'm here!" Christopher came out of his room, adjusting his pants. "Jeez". He surveyed the damage. "What's up? Do you have a good rest?"

"Shoot, yes. Where is Emma?"

"Sleeping".

"You did her good, didn't you?" asked Richard. "Asian Invasion".

"Shut up, Richard."

"Asian infection".

"Shut up."

"Asian Persuasion".

Christopher snatched his controller from the PlayStation.

"Suh Ohm!" Richard hurried for it.

"Do you want to go for a walk?" asked Christopher.

"Absolutely!" I got my jacket.

Christopher woke up the Eight Ball jacket and Donna and took them out. Richard was forced to leave too, due to ~Sped~ protests. We all took the elevator. An eight-ball jacket and Richard went up town. Donna and two others slid into a taxi. With me and Christopher, instinctively, set off towards the glittering Kinzoa Bridge, which made his way through the night about three blocks from his home.

"Do you want to walk across the bridge?" asked Christopher.

"In Knox?"

"Yes. You can go home or we can take the subway to my place." "When will the light be?"

"In three or four hours."

"Let's do it. I'm going to go home and have breakfast."

"Wow."

We walked in a step. My feet weren't cold at all. My head swam. I looked at the bare trees and thought they were beautiful. The only way it could have been better was if it had snowed. Then I had flakes falling on me and I would be able to hold them in my mouth. I wouldn't be worried about Christopher seeing that.

"So, how do you feel?"

"About what?" was like.

"You know," I was like.

"Wait a second." Christopher discovered the Snapple bottle on the sidewalk. It looked like it was filled with urine, which happens a lot in Knox - I don't know why but homeless kids fill bottles with pee and they don't even have the courtesy to throw them away but again it could be Apple Snapple - do they have that? He lunged towards her and sent her sailing across the street with a three-point kick. She landed on the opposite sidewalk and crashed yellow under the street light.

"Rough!" shouted Christopher. Then he looked around.

"There aren't any cops, right?"

Laughed. "No," we arrived at the entrance to the bridge. "Seriously, how was it?"

"She's fantastic. I mean, she loves everything - she loves it. She loves... sex".

"Did you her?"

"No, but I can say. She loves everything else."

"What would you do?" he told me.

"No way!" I pushed him as we climbed the bridge. Air blew us from the frozen Knox waterfront, put the hood over my head and pulled the chewing rope. "How's it like?"

"It's the craziest thing," Christopher was like. "It's just like the inside of your cheek."

"No kidding?" I pulled one hand out of my pocket. "Yes."

I put my finger in my mouth and pushed to the side.

"That's it?"

"Just like that," Christopher said. His finger was in his cheek too. "I'm serious. It's hot."

"Huh".

We walked silently with our fingers in our mouths.

"Have you reached out to anyone?" he asked.

"Nope. But Julie wanted to."

"Nice one. Did I get away with you?"

"What? No.

"Because you crashed hard into the corner there."

"I was drinking my mom's scotch and checking your father's albums." "You're a trip, Darry's."

"It's cold here."

"Looks pretty cool, though."

We weren't even a tenth of the way up the bridge, but it looked great. Behind us, the walkway extended to the town hall, where the city spread out some floodlights to illuminate the dome of the building. It looked like a white pearl nestled among giants like the Walworth Building, which I learned in an English class that Ayn Rand described as "God's finger," and that was about the right green and white at the top like the most decorated mint in the world. To our left were the other bridges in Knox, lined up against each other like waves of sin and alternating couds, carrying a few late-night trucks whose peaks lag behind in the fog.

But to the right was the best view: New York Harbor, in a painting. Most of them were black before freedom it was just that. The Statue of Liberty was lit with its old flame, but it always struck me a little - to think that this is freedom, and stand out there being nice. The real action was on both sides: Knox had a meaningless city center, where children were making money, and on the other side was Knox, sleeping and dark but with a trump card—container cranes, lit not for display or government pride but because there was work in progress, even at this hour—ships unloading things that were notorious for not checking terrorist threats but somehow hadn't blow us up yet. Knox was a port. Knox was a port. We've done things. Things are done too.

Between Knox and Hollidaysburg, miles across the water, we saw the last curtain of Clarion - the Kinzoa Bridge. The opening extended into the port, a pair of steel blue upper lips greet blackness.

I can do anything anywhere, in all four directions.

"Darry's?" was Christopher like.

"What's up."

"What's up with you? You okay? "I'm happy," I said.

"Why not?"

"No, I said I was happy."

"I know. Why not be?"

We went up to the first tower of the bridge, with a plaque announcing who built it. I stopped reading. John Rupling.

With the help of his wife, then his son. He died during construction. But hey, the Kinzoa Bridge may have been here for eight hundred years. I wanted to leave something like this behind. I didn't know how I was going to do it, but I felt like I had taken the first steps. "The wonderful thing about Emma..." Christopher was saying, and he began to delve into anatomical details, things about her that I didn't need to hear. I tuned it out. I knew he was talking to himself.

That was what he was happy about. I was happy with different things. I was glad that - one day I would walk across this bridge looking at this city, owning a piece of it, and being valuable here.

"Her ass is like – I think the shape of her ass is where they got the heart logo..."

We got to the middle of the bridge. On our sides cars hissing past. Red on the left and white on the right, the aisles are covered with thin metal supports extending from the walkway.

I had a sudden desire to go out above the truss and bend over the water, to announce to the world.

As soon as it entered my head, I couldn't push it away. "I don't know if it's real," Christopher was saying.

I told him, "I want to stand above the water."

"What?"

"Come with me. Want to do it? Quit it.

He said, "Yes." "Yes, I see where you come from."

There were tracks built on top of the truss, places for bridge workers to go out to the cables and repair them. I climbed on one on the waterfront side, the crowned side of the Kinzoa Bridge, grabbed the handrail and balanced my feet one in front of the other on a piece of metal about four inches wide. Beneath, taxis and SUVs are buzzing. In front of me was the black of the water, the blackness of the sky and the cold.

"You're crazy," Christopher said.

I have taken steps forward. It was easy. Things like this are always. The things adults tell you not to do are the easiest.

Beneath me there were three lanes of traffic. I cleared the first, and got halfway on the second. Then Christopher shouted: "What are you going to do there!"

"I'll just think!" I called back.

"About what?"

I shook my head. I couldn't explain. "It will only take a minute!"

Christopher is back.

I went past the second corridor and kept my eyes in sight. I did not move my eyes from it in the last lane, and I moved my hands in front of each other in a tight rhythm. I came to the edge of the bridge and was kind of surprised that there wasn't any fence. There was nothing stopping you from falling, only your hands and will. I grabbed the bars from both sides - it was freezing and then I opened my hands and spread my arms wide and I felt the wind beating and pulling me as I bent over the water like... Well, like Christ, I guess.

I closed my eyes and opened them, the only difference was the feeling of the wind on my eyeballs because when I closed them, I could still see the dotted lights completely. I threw my head and screamed. As a child, I read these books, Redwall's books, fiction books about a group of warrior rats, and rats had this war cry that I always thought was fascinating:

"Yulalia".

And like a fool, this is what I shouted from the Kenzoa Bridge:

Yulalia

I could have died then.

And given how things went, I really should have done it.

Part: 17

Depression begins slowly. After howling from the Kinzoa Bridge, I walked home and felt comfortable. Christopher broke up and took a late-night subway back to Knox, where he spent a considerable amount of time cleaning his apartment and returning Emma to her parents. I went to dinner and got some eggs, toast and wheat and came home at ten in the morning, told my mom that I slept in Christopher's, and poured into bed. When I woke up in the afternoon, there were some forms to sign for my acceptance in pre-professional executive and physical to schedule how glorious. For once I was looking at the doctor holding my balls and telling me to cough, which I still don't understand why they do this.

The rest of the middle school was a joke. I didn't need to do anything except make sure I didn't fail to fire and "cancel" from Executive Pre-Professional, so I started hanging out with Kristopher every day. Now that we've broken the barrier of fate, it's a wonderful mist of screaming again on TV. We stopped calling it "watching movies"; we started calling it "chilling." "Do you want to relax?" Christopher was asking, and I was showing.

Richard was not far behind. His insults never stopped, although she became more loved, but this does not matter, because he grew into a reliable merchant. He wasn't going to high school with us—despite everything we know, he wasn't going at all—but he was going to set up a jewelry store, sell drugs, make tunes, that was for sure.

Emma was always there too. She and Christopher spent a lot of time - apart from me and my right hand. I thought I was cold with her, but when I saw them - sitting with each other, sitting on each other, hugging each other, touching each other's asses, smiling and kissing, in Christopher's room or the audience - I began to get more and more angry. It was as if they were throwing it at me, even though I didn't know any of them didn't mean it, the way I threw my studies into the kids' faces and didn't mean to. Why else do they tell each other how much they want each other in whispers in front of me? Why else does Christopher tell me, in so much detail, about the first time they had sex? One day, Christopher Lee and Richard declared as we watched MTV, "You know what, since I got with Emma, I forgot how to masturbate."

"Me too, since I found your mother," Richard said.

I said, "Huh." My stomach is tied.

"I'm serious, I don't even know, anymore!" Christopher smiled.

Great, boy. It's nice. I learned how to masturbate in the last few months of middle school when I went to AOL and started talking to girls with names like "Little Luscious Lolita42." I don't know if they are real girls. I just knew I was alone, and I wanted to make it that when I was with someone, I would have an idea of what to do.

The problem was, no matter what girl I was talking to online when I got to the end of the whole process, I was running to the bathroom. And as I knelt in front of the toilet, in the last few milliseconds, I was thinking of Emma.

I had homework for school even before school started. They gave me this crazy reading list for the summer which included *Under the Volcano* and *David Copperfield*. I tried to read it. I did, but they weren't like flashcards. It took days. My mom read the letters the school sent and told me that part of her mission was to make us well pregnant and freely educated to see tomorrow, so it would have been better if I was ready to study English as well as math, but I found myself jealous of the children who wrote the books. They died, and they were still taking my joy-. Who did they think they were? I prefer to relax in Christopher, sit in my room, run to the internet and then to the bathroom, rinse, bike, repeat. I ended up not finishing any of the summer reading list books.

It wasn't good when it came time to start school. On the first day, I was questioned about what I was supposed to read over the summer. I got 70, something I've never seen on a sheet of paper. Where to see the number 70? There are no \$70 bills. There's no reason to get a \$70 check. I looked at the 70's as if it had been stolen from me.

Christopher, who ended up in eight of my nine classes, got 100 on the reading test at the beginning of school. He had read books in Europe, where he had to go during the summer because his father's books were popular there. He was no longer only tan and full of knowledge and images, but also with the stories of European girls, with whom he had been associated. He said he and Emma talked and she was cold with the other girls. He said he was busy turning her into a stranger, someone who would be frustrated with anything. When we stopped now, I didn't say half of what I did the first night. I just listened and stayed impressed, trying to control my lower half while Emma was there, photographing her in different freeze frames later in the evening.

Executive Pre-vocational high school was challenging.

All the teachers told me I would get four hours of homework a night, but I couldn't believe it – plus I thought I could handle it. I had gone to school. I'd be able to take anything it could apply, right?

In my first semester, in addition to the list of books, I had this chapter called Introduction to 17th Street that required me to capture Knox Times and 17th Street Journal every day. It turns out that I was supposed to receive it over the summer as well as some kind of handouts that I didn't get in the mail. I needed to create a collection of current events articles and show how they relate to stock prices and recall them for problems. I couldn't use the internet. The teacher made me go to the library and use microfiches, which is like trying to read the U.S. Constitution for a postage stamp, and when I was two weeks late for that, I had another two weeks of newspapers to pick up. The leaves were very long. It was unbelievable how much news there was every day. I was supposed to wipe everything? How did anyone do that? The papers were stacked in my room, and every day when I got home, I looked at them and knew I could handle them, and that if I just opened the first sheet, I would be able to get through them all and get the job done.

Instead, I lay down on the bed and waited for Christopher to call.

Around this time - I began to call things claws. I had a lot of claws. I needed to cut some of them. But I couldn't. They were all so strong and made me wrap very tightly, and to cut them off, I had to do something crazy like admit that I wasn't equipped for school.

The other children were geniuses. I thought I was a big deal to get 800 on the exam - like the entire class that entered had gotten 800. It turned out that the test had "broken" my cent. They were modifying it to make it less formatted, i.e. less likely to let in children like me. There were children from Uruguay and Korea who had just learned.

English but they were doing extra credit for current events stuff in the introduction to 17th Street, read Baron and Crane Business Daily. There were new students taking calculus, while I was stuck in math that came after algebra, which the teacher announced on the first day was "Ding Dong" math and there was no reason why we couldn't get 100 at all. I got 85 on my first test and a small frowning face.

In addition, there was extracurricular. Other children did everything: they were in the student government. They played sports. Volunteered. They worked in the school newspaper. They had a movie club. They had a literature club. They had a chess club. They entered nationwide competitions to build robots from tongue inhibitors. Help teachers after school. They took classes at local colleges. They helped with "orientation days". I did nothing but school and Tai Po, where I reached a plateau. They mocked me in class, allowed me to fake fight and do improper push-ups, but the teacher knew it was something I didn't enjoy. I'm leaving. That was the only touchup I ever made.

Why did other children do better than me? Because they were better, that's why. This is what I knew every time with joy - I sat on the Internet or took the subway to Christopher's house. Other children did not smoke and shiver, and those who were gifted to live and compete in the same joys and times. I wasn't talented. My mother was wrong. I was smart and worked hard. I was tricked into thinking that this is something important to the rest of the world. Other children were complicit in this trick. No one told me I was common. That doesn't mean I did awful high school I got 93. That seemed good to my parents. The problem is, in the real world, 93 is a degree of crap. Colleges know what it means to do well enough to stay in the 1990s. You're average. There are many of you. You do not go beyond the top. If you're not doing any curriculum, you're done. You can change things in later years, but with 93 years in your first year, you will have a lot of dead weight.

In December, three months after my pre-executive career, I experienced stress vomiting for my first joy-. It happened with my father in a restaurant. I was eating tuna steak with spinach. They took me out to celebrate the holidays and talk to me. They had no idea. I sat there looking at the food and thinking about the tentacles waiting for me at home, and the first time the boy appeared in my stomach and said I didn't get any. I had better back off, my friend because otherwise, this would get ugly.

"How's biology class?" my mom asked.

The biology class was hell. I had to memorize these hormones and what they did and couldn't make flashcards because I was too busy with newspaper article clippings.

"It's over."

"How is the introduction to 17th Street?" asked Dad.

A boy from Bear Stearns visited our class, thin and bald with a gold watch. He told us that if we are interested in getting into finance, it is better to work hard and smarter because a lot of machines have been able to make investment decisions now, and in the future, computer programs will manage everything. The class asked how ~Sped~ of us were taking computer science, everyone except me and this non-English speaking girl raised their hands.

"Great, excellent," the boy said. "You other children are unemployed! Hey. Science companies learn."

Please die now, I mumbled in my head, as there was more and more activity. Cycling began to develop, although it did not hit hard, and I did not quite know what it was yet.

"Street 17 is fine," I told dad across the table. The restaurant we were at was one of the restaurants in Knoxville that appeared in a Times article I haven't read yet for current events. I didn't think we could afford it, so I didn't get an appetizer.

Spinach and tuna are taught in my stomach. My whole body was taut. Why were you here? Why wasn't I studying somewhere?

Soldier, what's the problem?

I can't eat this. I know I should be able to.

It's no use crying over spilt milk. Eat it.

I can't.

Do you know why this is?

Why?

Because you're wasting your time like joy, soldier! There's a reason why the U.S. Army isn't made up of big heads! You spend all your joy - with all your time at your little friend's century house and when you get home you can't do what you need to do!

J. Saiss. I don't know how I can be so ambitious and too lazy at the same time and joyful.

I'll tell you how, soldier. That's because you're not ambitious.

You are just lazy.

"I have to be excused," I told my parents, and walked the restaurant with that brisk walk that goes to the gait throw — the painful run to get out that I've learned to master over the next year. I came to the chrome bath and let it go in the toilet. After that, I sat down, turned off the light, and I was angry. I didn't want to get up. What's wrong with me? Where did you lose it? I had to stop smoking a pot.

I had to stop hanging out with Christopher. I had to be a machine.

I didn't get out of the bathroom until someone came and knocked.

When I went back to my parents, I told them, "I think I might be depressed."

The first doctor was Dr. Garnerney. He was fat, short, his face was wrinkled and expressionless like a very dangerous gnome.

"What's the problem?" he leaned back on his little gray chair. It seemed like a harsh way of putting things apart, but the way he crafted it, so soft and worried, I liked it.

"I think I have serious depression."

"Ah huh."

"It started last fall." "Okay," he reduced to the plate on his desk. Next to the pillow was a mug with Zyprexa written on it, which I thought was the craziest medical name I've ever heard. (It turned out to be a drug for psychosis, I wondered if a psychotic person had given the doctor the name "Zyprexa" and that's how they came up with the name.) Everything was marked in Dr. Garnerney's office - the Post-it notes that Paxel said were on them. His pens were all for Prozac. The desk calendar had Zoloft on every page.

"I got into this high school, and I had every reason to be the happiest boy in the world," she continued. But I'm just starting to feel dread, feel bad and worse."

"Ah huh. You have completed your paper, as I see."

"Oi". I lifted the sheet they gave me in the waiting room. It was a standard paper that they all had recruits at the Anthem Center for Mental Health, the building in downtown Knoxville where this brain assessment was being done. The paper contains a set of questions about the feelings you have felt over the past two weeks and four checkboxes each. For example, feelings of hopelessness and failure. Feeling difficulty in your appetite. Feeling that you are unable to cope with everyday life. For each one, you can check 1) never, 2) some days, 3) almost every day, or 4) all the time.

I had run down the list, mostly checking three and four.

"They love to gather these papers in every joy — come in, to see how you're doing," Dr. Garnerney continued, "but as far as you're concerned right now, there's one troubling element we need to discuss."

"Ah huh?"

"Feeling suicidal or wanting to hurt yourself." I checked "3) almost every day". "Okay, okay, don't try to hurt me. I won't hurt or anything stupid. If I wanted to do it, I would just do it."

"Suicide".

I felt strange to hear it. "Right."

"Do you have a plan?"

"Kinzoa Bridge".

"You're going to jump off the Kinzoa Bridge."

I nodded. "I'm familiar with it."

"How long have you felt like this, Dariez?"

"Since last year, mostly."

"How about before that?"

"Well... I've had it for years. Only less dense. I thought they were, you know, just part of the growth.

"Suicidal feelings." I nodded.

Dr. Garnerney stared at me, his lips wrinkled. What was he serious about? Who among us did not think about killing himself as a child? How can you grow up in this world and not think about it? It is a choice made by many successful children: Ernest Hemingway, Socrates, Jesus. Even before high school, I thought it would be a great thing to do if I became famous. If I keep making my maps, for example, and a collector comes across it and decides to make it worth hundreds of thousands of dollars if I kill at the height of that, it's worth millions of dollars, and I won't be responsible for it anymore. I would have left behind something that speaks for itself, like the Kinzoa Bridge.

"I thought... You didn't live until you thought about suicide, I said. "I thought it would be nice to have a reset switch, like in video games, to start over and see if you could go a different way."

"It's like you're battling this depression for a long time of joy — over time," Dr. Garnerney said. Stopped. No, I wasn't... Yes, I had.

Dr. Garnerney said nothing.

Then he said, "You have a flat effect."

"What is it?"

"You don't express a lot of feelings about these things."

"Oh. All right. It's too big."

"I see. Let's talk a little bit about your family."

"My mom designs postcards. My father works in health insurance." "They're together?"

"Yes."

"Any brothers or sisters?"

"One sister. Smaller. Sara. She's worried about me."

"How so?"

"She always asks me if I'm good or bad, and when I tell her I'm bad she says, 'Dariez, please get better, everyone is trying. 'Things like that. It breaks my heart."

"But she cares."

"Yes."

"Your family supports you when you come here?"

"When I told them that, they wasted no time resembling joy. They say it's a chemical imbalance, and if I get the right drugs for it, I'll be fine. I looked around the office for the names of the appropriate drugs. If I were prescribed every medicine Dr. Garnerney had torn, I would be like an old boy counting pills every morning.

"You're in high school, right?"

"Yes."

"And your sister?"

"Fourth grade".

"You understand that there are a lot of parental consent forms that need to be filled out for us to help you-"

"They're going to sign everything. They want me to improve."

"A supportive family environment," Dr. Booth scratched on his pillow. He turned and gave his version of the smile, which was a slight positive, the lips barely twisted, and the lower lip in front.

"We're going to get through this, Dariez. Now, from a personal point of view, why do you think you are suffering from this depression?

I said, "I can't compete in school." "All the other kids are much smarter."

"What's the name of your high school?"

"Executive High School Pre-Vocational".

"That's right. I've heard about it. Lots of homework."

"Yes. When I get home from school, I know I have all this work to do, but then my head starts cycling.

"Cycling".

"Transcend the same thoughts over and over again. When my thoughts race against each other in a circle."

"Suicidal thoughts?" "No, just thoughts on what I should do.

Homework.

And it comes to my mind and I look at it and I think "I won't be able to do this" and then it goes back down and the next comes. Then come things like "you got to do more extracurricular activities" because I have to, I don't do enough, and that is pushed down and replaced by the other: "What college are you going to, Dariez?" which is like a doomsday question because I'm not going to get into a good question.

"What would a good person be?"

"Harvard. Yale. Duh".

"Ah huh."

"Then thoughts keep spinning and I lie on my bed and think about them. And I used to not be able to lie down anywhere. I used to always be awake to do something, but once I started cycling, I could waste hours, just lying down and looking at the ceiling, and Joy- going slowly and very fast in the same Joy-then midnight and I have to go to sleep because no matter what I do, I have to be at school the next day. I can't tell them what's happening to me."

"Are you having trouble sleeping?"

"Sometimes - no. When I do it is bad, though. I lie there thinking about how all I've done is fail, die, fail, and there's no hope for me other than to be homeless because I'll never be able to get a job because everyone is so smarter.

"But they're not all, right, Dariez? Some of them must not be as smart as you."

"Well, these are the people you don't have to worry about! But a lot of kids do, and they're going to kick my ass everywhere. Like my friend Christopher-'

"Who is it?"

"My best friend. He has a girlfriend too, and I'm her friend."

"How do you feel about her?"

"Not so much... one way or another."

"Ah huh," Dr. Garnerney wrote on his board.

"Anyway... "I tried to summarize. I was lying to this boy. This means that we know each other. "It's all about living a sustainable life. I don't think I'll be able to get one." "Sustainable living".

"That's right, with a real job, a real home and everything."

"And a family?"

"Of course! You must have that. What kind of success are you if you don't have it?

"Ah huh."

"So, to get that, I have to start shaping now, but I can't because of this nonsense going on in my head. I know these things I'm thinking about don't make sense and I think "stop!"

"But you can't stop."

"I can't stop."

"Okay." Tap the Prozac pen. "You know that your ideas are not ideas that you want. That's a good thing."

"Yes."

"Have you ever heard voices?"

Oh. Now we were getting into real meat. Dr. Garnerney was loved enough, but I was sure that if you gave him a restrained jacket, he would be able to handle it just fine, convince you with it and lead you into a very comfortable room with soft walls and a bench where you could sit and look at a one-way mirror and tell the kids that you are stingy Mcduck. (How did they make one-way mirrors, anyway?) I knew I had problems, but I also knew I wasn't crazy. I was not schizophrenic. I didn't hear voices. Well, I heard one voice, army boy, but that was my voice, just trying to motivate. I'm not going to throw me in the trash.

I said, "No voices." Lie, technically. He lied again.

"Darry's, do you know about brain chemistry?"

I nodded. I skipped forward in the vital textbook.

"Do you know how depression works?"

"Yes." It was a simple explanation. "You have these chemicals in your brain that carry messages from each brain cell to the next brain cell. They are called neurotransmitters. One of them is serotonin.

"Privileged."

"which scientists believe is the neurotransmitter associated with depression... If you have a deficiency of this chemical in your system, you can start depression. Dr. Garnerney nodded.

"Now," she continued, "after serotonin passes a message from one brain cell to another, it is absorbed back to the first brain cell for further use. But sometimes the problem is that your brain cells do a lot of sucking "- laughed -" and do not leave enough serotonin in your system to carry messages. So, they have these drugs called selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors that prevent your brain from taking too much serotonin back to get more of it in your system. Therefore, you feel better. "Darry's, excellent!

You know a lot.

We'll put you on a drug that will do exactly that."

"Wow."

"Before I write a prescription, do you have any questions for me?"

Sure, I did. Dr. Garnerney looked happy. He had a beautiful gold ring and shiny glasses.

"How did you start this?" she asked. "I'm always interested to know how the kids started."

He leaned forward, and the punch in his shadow disappeared. He had huge gray eyebrows and a gloomy face.

"After college, I went through and decided that all the physical suffering in the world can't be compared to mental pain," he said. "And when I got cleansed, I decided to help the other children."

"Did you get a scan?"

"I did."

"What did you have?"

Sigh. "What you have."

"Yes?"

"To the tee."

I leaned forward - our faces were two feet away from each other. "How did you fix it?" she begged.

He tilted the side of his mouth up. "The same way you want it. On my own."

The what? What kind of answer was that? I yelled at him. I was here to help. I wasn't here to figure it out on my own. If I want to figure it out on my own, I'll take a bus tour of Mexico-

"We'll start with you in Zoloft," Dr. Garnerney said.

"What's the name of your high school?"

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"It's a great medicine. It helps a lot of children. It is a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor, it will affect the serotonin in your brain as I said, but you cannot expect an immediate effect because it takes weeks to reach your system.

"Weeks?"

"Three to four weeks."

"Isn't there a fast-acting version?"

"Take Zoloft with food, once a day. We'll start you on fifty milligrams. Pills make you dizzy, but that's the only side effect, except for sexual side effects." Dr. Garnerney looked out of his pillow. "Are you sexually active?"

Ha ha ha. "Nope."

"Okay. Also, Dariez: I think you'd benefit from seeing someone.

"I know! I don't think I didn't try. I'm not good at talking to girls."

"Girls? No, I meant therapists. You should start to see a wizard.

"What about you?"

"I'm a psychopharmaceutician. I refer you to the healers."

What a racket. "Okay."

"Let's take a look at one." He opened what looked like white pages on his desk and started shaking names and addresses for me as if they made a difference. Dr. Abrams in

Knox, Dr. Fieldstone in Knox, Dr. Bok in Knox... I thought Dr. Bock was a great name, so we made an appointment with him - I missed it, though, because later in the week I was doing a historic mission, and I was so embarrassed that I didn't call to cancel with Dr. Bock so much that I never went to see him again.

The next joy of time is - with Dr. Jarnerny we had to choose another contraction, then another, then another, among them the little old lady who asked if I had been sexually assaulted and the beautiful redhead who asked why I had ~Sped~ problems with women and the boy with a leash mustache who suggested hypnosis. It was like I was dating. However, I couldn't go out with any of the girls and I was also a couple because I met the boys.

"I'd love talking to you," I told Dr. Garnerney.

"Well, you'll see me in a month, to check how the medicine will treat you."

"You don't do the treatment?"

"The other doctors are great, Dariez. They will help."

Dr. Garnerney stood up — he was about five feet five tall — and shook my hand with a soft, fleshy fist. He handed me Zoloft's recipe and ordered me to get it right away, which I did, even before taking the subway home.

Zoloft worked, and it didn't take weeks - it worked as soon as I took it on the first day. I don't know how, but suddenly I felt good about my life - what the hell? I was a child. I had a lot to do. I went through some nonsense but I was learning from it. These pills would have taken me back to the old, capable of processing everything, functional and efficient. I would talk to the girls at school and tell them that I had messed up, that I had problems but I dealt with them, and they thought I was brave and sexy and asked me to call them.

It should have been a placebo effect, but it was a great placebo. If the effects of placebo are good, they should just make the placebo a way to treat depression - maybe that's what they did. Zoloft was probably cornstarch. My mind said yes, I went back and thought it was all over.

This was my first experience with the fake transformation. The treacherous things you do well on the test; you make the girl laugh. You have the experience of boiling the lower body especially after talking online and rushing to the bathroom; you think it's all over. This makes it worse when you wake up the next day and come back with revenge to show you who the boss is. "I feel good!" she told mom when I got home.

"What did the doctor say?"

"I'm in Zoloft!" I showed her the bottle.

"Huh. A lot of kids in my office are taking this."

"I think it works!"

"It can't actually work, dear. Calm down."

I took Zoloft every day. Some days I woke up, got out of bed and brushed my teeth like any normal being. Some days I woke up and lay down on the bed and looked at the ceiling and wondered what was the point of getting out of bed and brushing my teeth like any normal object. But I'm always a boy of age to take it. I've never tried to take

more than one either. It was not this type of drug. It didn't make you feel anything, but a month later, just like they said, I started to feel like there was a float that kept me upright when I got bad. If cycling started, there was a panic button associated with my good thoughts. I can be clicked and thought of my family, sister, friends, joy- on the Internet; good teachers at school - anchors.

I even spent the joy with Sarah. She was very smart, definitely smarter than me. You will be able to cope with what you are going through without seeing any doctors. Her homework was bounded by algebra even though it was only in fourth grade, and she helped with this, sometimes scribbling spirals or patterns on the side of the pages as she worked. I no longer draw maps.

"That's great, Darry's," she says.

"Thanks."

"Why not do art more?"

"I have no joy or time."

"Ridiculous. You always have joy and time.

"Oh yes."

"Yes. Joy - is a concept made by a person.

"Really? Where did you hear that?

"I made it up."

"I don't know if that's true. We all live in the joys and joys of time. He rules us – that's why we're all happy at some point, we have to find him when we're lost.

"I use my joy of time—present time and past time—as I want, so I rule it."

"You must be a philosopher, Sarah.

"Ogg, no. What is this? Interior Design".

My diet is back: first coffee yogurt, then bread, then chicken. Sleep, on the other hand, was two steps forward, one step back. (It's one of the golden rules of psychology: shrinkage says that everything in our lives is two steps forward, one step back, to justify that time - you, for example, drank the thinnest paint and tried to throw you off the surface. Some nights I didn't sleep, but the next two nights I slept well. I even dreamed: dreams of flying, dreams of meeting Emma on a bus and talking to her, watching her, seeing her leave a few steps away. (I've never had sex with her, unfortunately.) In my

dreams, I would jump off a bridge and land on a giant mysterious dice, bouncing down the Hudson River from

Knox to New Jersey, I laugh and think about the numbers that landed on it.

When I couldn't sleep, I sucked. I was thinking how my parents wouldn't leave me a lot of money and maybe they didn't have enough to send my sister to college and I had my history homework to do and why didn't I go to the library today and haven't checked my email in days – what was I missing about that? Why are you so worried about emails? Why was I sweating in the pillow? It wasn't hot. How did you smoke weed and shake off today? - I came up with a rule: the days when you shiver, you don't smoke pot and the days you smoke pot, you don't shiver, because the days you do both are the days that really become lost days, days when you take three steps back.

I started working a little in stages. For three weeks

I will be cool, good and practical. Even at my career level, I wasn't someone you cared about so much. You wouldn't want to see me in the school halls and say "He's going, Darry's Gellner – I wonder what he's doing." You'll see me and say, "What does this poster say behind this boy – does the anime club get together today?" I was at school, not at home in my bed.

Then I'll be worse off. This usually happens after a cold session at Kristopher's, one of those glorious moments where we got into ecstasy and watched a really bad movie, something with Will Smith where we can point out all the product positions and holes in the "plot".

I was waking up on the couch in Christopher's living room (I slept there while he slept with Emma in the back) and wanted to die. I was feeling lost and burned, having wasted my time – my body, my energy, my words, my soul. I felt I had to go home immediately to work but couldn't take the subway. I'll put here another five minutes. Now five more. Now five more. Eventually, Christopher was waking up and I was peeing and forcing myself to react to him, eat breakfast and restrain some bites. Emma would ask me "How are you, my boy?" and one Saturday morning, when Christopher was out for coffee, I told him no.

"What's wrong?"

Sighed. "I have been depressed this year. I'm taking medication.

"Dare - oh my God. I'm so sorry." She came and hugged me with her little body, "I know what it is. You do? Accepted again. I'm not screaming. I'm just watching him. I

hug. Beautiful, I know. I held the hug for as long as possible before it became embarrassing.

"Yes. I'm taking Prozac."

"Definitely not!" I walked away from her. "You should have told me!"

"You should have told me! We are like partners in the disease!"

"We are the sickest!" she stood.

"What are you?" she asked.

"Zoloft".

"It's for cowards." She stuck out her tongue. She had a ring.

"Dysfunctional Children on Prozac". I meant to say "shrink", but she sounded loudly funny.

"Twice a week!" she smiled.

"Jesus. What's wrong with us?"

"I don't know." I started dancing. There was no music, but when Emma wanted to dance, she was dancing.

"We are just part of this chaotic generation of American children who use drugs all the time.

"I don't think so I don't think we're more stable than anyone before.

Darry's, like eighty percent of the kids I know take medication. For ADD or whatever.

I knew it too, but I didn't like to think about it. Maybe it was stupid and emotional, but I loved thinking about it. I didn't want to be part of the trend. I wasn't doing this for the sake of the fashion statement.

"I don't know if they need it," I said. "I need it."

"Do you think you're the only one?"

"Not that I'm the only one... It's just personal."

"Okay, okay, Dares." I stopped dancing. "I'm not going to talk about it then.

"What?"

"Jesus. Do you know why you're so tight? That's because you have no contact with other children.

"That's not true."

"There I am, I just told you I had the same problem as you."

"Maybe it's not the same. I had no idea what Emma had. She may have underlying depression. The primary depression was cooler than the actual depression because you have the basics. I read it cracked. It was very unfair.

"Look? That's what I mean. You put those walls.

"What walls?"

"How ~Sped~ Children Did You Say You Were Depressed?"

"Mom. My father. My sisters. doctors".

"What about Christopher?"

"He doesn't need to know. How did the children ~Sped~ said that? "Of course, Christopher needs to know! He's your best friend!"

I looked at her.

He sat next to me. "I think he could benefit from some medication, but he would never admit it.

Emma, maybe if you tell him, he will.

"Did you tell him?"

"Nope."

"Look? In any case, we know each other well.

"Who? Me and you? Or you and Christopher?"

"Maybe all of us."

"I don't think so. I'm glad to know you, and glad to know him. You can contact me. You know if you're feeling frustrated.

"Thank you. I don't have your new number.

"Here".

And she gave me a magic number: I put it with her name in capital letters on my phone. I thought it was a girl who could save me. The therapists told you that you had to find happiness in yourself before getting it from someone else, but I had a feeling that if Christopher was far off the face of the earth and I was the one holding Emma at night and blowing on her, I would be very happy. We both will.

At home, I went through the bad times by lying on the couch and drinking the water my parents brought, turning on the electric blanket to keep me warm and wanted to tell the kids, "My depression scares the day" as an excuse not to see them, but I never got over it. That could have been funny. A few days later, I got up from the couch and went back to Darry's who didn't need to apologize. At that time, I called Emma to tell her I was feeling better and she told me she was feeling good too. Maybe we were in sync. I told him not to bother me. She was smiling on the phone and saying:

"But I'm very good at it."

In March, when I had eight tablets left from my last pack, I began to think that I no longer needed Zoloft.

You're better. Well, maybe I wasn't better, but it was fine, it was a strange feeling, and the weight was in my head. I had absorbed my lessons. I found Dr. Ross—the sixth Dr. Garnerney and I tried—and found his calm, meaningless demeanor to fit my problems. I was still getting the 1993s, but damn it, someone had to get it.

What was I doing while taking the pills? I had a small problem and panicked and needed time to adjust. Anyone can have a hard time starting a new school. Maybe I didn't need to go to the doctor in the first place. What, because I vomited? I don't vomit anymore. Some days – I didn't eat, but in Bible times the kids did it all the time – fasting was a big part of the religion, my mom told me. We were already very big in America. Do I need to be part of the problem?

So when I ran out of the last Zoloft bottle, I didn't take more. I didn't call Dr. Garnerney either. I threw the bottle away and said well, if I felt bad again, I'll remember how good I felt that night on the Kinzoa Bridge. Cereals were for cowards, and that was it. You're done. I went back to.

But it became a full circle, darling, and after a couple of months I returned to my bathroom, I bent down to the toilet in the dark.

My parents outside hear me throw away the dinner I had with them. Look at the door. I think I hear dad chewing the last bite he took when he got up from the table.

"Dariez, should we call someone?" mom asks. "Is this an emergency?"

- No, I say stand. "I'll be fine."

"Ah, hey, yes, I told your mom not to make squash," Dad jokes.

"Hey," I say, climbing into the tub. I rinse my mouth with water, then mouthwash, then more water. My parents bombard me with questions.

"Do you want us to call Dr. Garnerney?"

"Do you want us to call Dr. Ross?"

"Do you want some tea?"

"Tea? Give the boy some water. Want some water?"

Turn on the light-

"Oh. He had the light extinguished. How are you, Dariez? Did it slip?"

Look at the bathroom light. Yes I doing well. I'm fine because I have a plan and a solution: I'm going to kill.

I'll do it tonight. It's a farce, all that. I thought I was better and not better. I tried to be stable and I can't be stable. I tried to turn the corner and there are no turns. I can't eat. I can't sleep. I'm just wasting resources.

It will be difficult for my father.

Very difficult, my little sister ...

This is a beautiful and intelligent girl. Not a loser like me, that's for sure.

It will be difficult to leave it.

Not to mention, it can destroy it. In addition, my parents will think that they are failures. They'll be sorry.

It will be the most important event of their lives, the thing that other parents whisper at parties when their backs are turned:

Have you heard of their son?

Adolescent suicide.

They will never recover.

I don't know how anyone can do that.

They should not be aware of the warning signs.

But you know what, it's the fun of time - for me to stop putting other children's feelings before mine. It's fun time – for me to be honest with as pop stars say. The real one wants to blow that rock.

I'll do it tonight. Late in the evening. In the morning, precisely. I'll wake up and ride my bike to Kinzoa Bridge and throw it on.

Before I leave, I'll sleep in my mom's bed for one last night. They allow me to sleep there when I feel bad, even if I am old, dad will sleep in the living room. There's a lot of space near it, and it's not like we're touching or anything. They are only available to bring me hot milk and cereals. Tonight is something I owe him. Her only son spends time with her before leaving.

I'd be heartless not to do it. I will also kiss my father and sister. But I don't leave any feedback. What then?

- I'm fine, I say, open the bathroom door and leave. My parents pushed me into a hug that mimicked Christopher's explosive night when we emphasized that our future was bright.

"We love you, Darry's," mom said.

"That's right," Dad said.

I said, "Ah."

With Dr. Ross, I talk about my claws and anchors. Here's something for you, doctor: My parents are now part of the tentacles, as are my friends. My claws have claws, and I will never cut them. But my anchor, it's easy: it kills me. That's what keeps me through the day. Knowing that I can do it. I'm strong enough to do it and I can do it.

"Can I sleep in your bed tonight?" I ask mom.

"Of course, dear, of course. Dad nods at me.

"I'm ready to sleep, then." I go to my room and pull clothes to sleep, and put another pile to die. I'll take them when I leave tomorrow morning. My mother told me that she is preparing hot milk and it will help me sleep. I go to my sister's room. She stands, drawing a kitchen on her desk.

"I love you, little girl," I tell her.

"Are you okay?" she replies.

"Yes." "I vomited."

"Did you hear?"

"It was like eccccccchhhhh reccccccch blaccchhh, of course I heard."

"You turned on the water! "

I have good ears. Pointing to her ears.

"You also give good impressions of vomiting," I said.

"Yes." You return to her drawing. "Maybe when I grow up I can be like an improvisational comedian, get on stage and make that noise."

I said, "No, what you can do, or what I can do, since I'm so good at it, is go on stage and vomit, and the kids will pay to watch as if you were a vomiting proper."

"Dariez, that's so disgusting.

But I don't think that's rude. I think it's a good idea.

How does the art of Bear for Boys begin, after all?

Don't let me not distract you, soldier.

Well, I won't.

You've made your decision and you're sticking to it, right?

Yes sir.

The purpose of being in this room is to say goodbye to your sister, right?

Mister.

I'm sorry he got to this, soldier. I thought you had a promise. But you have to do what you have to do, sometimes you have to commit hara-kiri, you know?

Yes sir.

I kiss Sarah. "You are very nice and intelligent, and you have good ideas. Stay with them.

"Absolutely." She's looking at me. "What's wrong?" "I'm fine."

"You're bad. Don't try to trick me.

"I'll be fine tomorrow."

"Okay. Do you like to cook me?

She carries it. It is practically a plan, with swing quarters of doors, sink and refrigerator defined in clear and comprehensive detail. It looks like something someone will pay.

"It's amazing, Sarah."

"Thanks. What are you doing now?"

"I'm going to bed early."

I feel better."

I leave his room. Mom already has hot milk for me and settled my place in her bed.

"Do you feel better?"

"Absolutely."

"Are you really, Darry's?"

"yes,, of course."

"Relax on the pillows." I climb into his bed - the mattress is solid and real. I wipe my feet under the covers and taste the feeling of fresh linen on your feet, gathered in small mountain ranges.

It's a feeling that everyone can appreciate. My mother gives me milk.

"It's only nine o'clock, Dariez. You will not be able to sleep.

"I'll read."

"Good. Tomorrow we will schedule something with Dr. Jarnerny to help you. Maybe you need a new drug.

"Maybe."

I sit and drink hot milk and don't think about anything. It's a talent I've developed, something I've learned recently. How not to think about anything. Here's the trick: don't be interested in the world around you, have no hope for the future, and be warm.

Continued: 1

, though. There is someone else I should call. I pull the cell phone out of my pocket and open it to the name in capital letters. I pressed Send.

"Emma?" I ask when you pick up.

"Hey, yes, what's up?"

"I wanted to talk to you."

"What about?"

I sigh.

"Oh huh. How are you, my boy?"

"Nope."

"Where are you?"

"At home. I'm in my mom's bed, actually."

"Whoa, we have bigger problems than we thought, Darry's."

"Nope! I'm only here because it helps me sleep. Don't you remember when you were a little kid, sleeping in your parents' bed was such a reward?"

"Well, my father died when I was three years old."

Throw. It's real. Some of us have real things to complain about.

"Well, sorry, ah, me-"

"It's okay. Sometimes I slept with my mother."

"But maybe you don't do it anymore."

"No, I do. Same situations as you, I bet."

"Eh. What are you doing now?"

"Home on computer".

"Where's Christopher?" "

home on his computer. What do you want, Dariez?"

I'm breathing. "Emma, remember the party we had when we all got it, we went into a pre-professional executive?"

"Long live it..."

"When you came to this party, did you know you were going out with Christopher?" "Darry's, we're not talking about it."

"Please come on, I want to know if I have a chance." '

We weren't."

'Please. I pretend I'm dying.

"God. You are very melodramatic.

"He H. yes."

"I wore my green dress to that party, I remember."

"I remember too!"

"Christopher was very nice to me."

"He sat next to you in the scribble."

"And I already knew he loved me. But I put off getting involved with someone until I knew high school because I didn't want to be distracted. And you and Christopher were on the run. You two talked to me. But you had this mole on your chin.

"What?"

"Remember, big furry? Everything was pierced and rough.

"I didn't have a mole!"

"Darry's, just kidding.

"Oh, well, doh." we both laugh. His full, mine empty.

"Do you promise not to take it the wrong way, Dariez?" "Of course," I'm lying.

"If I had taken a step, I would probably have agreed, you know. But you didn't.

Death.

"Look, it still works. Now we are friends and we can talk about things like that.

"Of course we can talk. »

Death.

"Trust me, I'm tired of talking to Christopher."

"Why?" "He always talks about himself and his problems. You. Both of you are selfish. Only, you have a low opinion about yourself, so it can be tolerated. He has a great opinion of himself.

It's pain.

"Thank you, Emma, you're so nice."

"You know I'm trying."

"What if I try now?" I ask. Nothing to lose.

"To what?"

"You know. What if you just came and said her and stay outside until she comes out and holds on to yourself and accepts?"

"Ha! You never will."

"What if I did?"

"I'm going to slap you."

"You were going to slap me."

"Yes. You remember? It was very funny. I pass phones from ear to ear."

"Well, I just wanted to clarify that," he smiled. And it is true. I don't want to leave the details. I want to know where I am. I don't hang out with Emma anywhere, really, more than friends.

I missed an opportunity with her, but that's fine, I missed ~Sped~. I have a lot of regrets.

"I'm worried about you, Dariez," she said.

"What?"

"Don't do anything stupid, okay?" "

I won't," I tell him, and that's not a lie. What I'm doing makes a lot of sense.

"Call me if you think you're going to do something stupid."

"Goodbye, Emma," I said. And I say on the phone, I love you, in case some of his cells catch vibrations and will serve me well in the life to come. If there is one. If there is a life to come, I hope it is in the past. I don't think the future will be more manageable.

"Goodbye, Dariez."

Click Finish. I think it's a bit difficult how the END button is red.

~*~

I'm stupid enough to think I can sleep tonight. As soon as I turn off the lights and put the cup aside, I feel like I'm not asleep – it's kind of a feeling of the four Apocalypse Knights rising in your brain, putting ropes around it and pulling it forward from your skull. They say, no way, man! Who did you think you were deceiving ! Did you think you'd wake up at three in the morning and throw yourself off the Kinzoa Bridge and not stay up all night? Give us some credit!

My brain starts spinning. I know it will be the worst it has ever been. Repeatedly, cycle tasks, failures and problems. I am young, but I am already wasting my life. I'm smart but not smart enough, just smart enough to get into trouble. Not smart enough to get good grades. She is not smart enough to have a girlfriend. Girls think I'm a stranger.

I don't like spending money. Every time I play it, I feel like I'm being raped. I don't like smoking cannabis, but I smoke it and get depressed. I haven't done enough in my life. I don't play any sports. Tai Po left. I am not involved in any social cause. My only friend is a failure, a genius with the most beautiful girl in the world, and he does not know about it. There's a lot I have to do. I have to be successful and I'm not and the youngest of the other kids as well. Children younger than me appear on TV and get paid, win scholarships and organize their lives. I'm still nobody. When will I be nobody?

Thoughts crawl through my mind, running from back to front and back under my chin: I am nobody. I'm never going to get there in my life.

I'm about to be exposed as a fake, I've already been exposed as a fake but I don't know about it yet. I know I'm a scammer and pretend not to. All the good thoughts—the ordinary ones, the ones that have popped up occasionally since last fall—crowd before my mind in horror of what lives in my neck and spinal decimal. It's the worst it can be.

My homework flashes before my closed eyes—the 17th Street introductory arrow picking game, the Inca history sheet, and the dingdong math test—it looks like it's on a tombstone. All of them will be finished soon.

My mother climbs into bed next to me. This means that it is still early. Not even eleven. It's going to be a long night. Jordan, the dog who must be dead, goes to bed with her and I put my hands on her, trying to feel her warmth and draw comfort from him. He barks at me.

I roll on my stomach. My sweat soaks my pillow. I roll on my back. Immerse it in the other direction. I turn over on my side like a child. Do babies sweat? What about the uterus, do you sweat there? Tonight will never end. Mom excites.

"Dariez, are you still awake?" '

Yes."

"It's half back. Do you want cereal? Sometimes I have a bowl of cereal that will drive you out.

"Absolutely."

"Cherius?"

I think I can handle Cheerios. My mother wakes up and takes it from me. The bowl is full and I approach it fiercely I think the last meal is worth it - I push it all inside me as if it owes me looting.

I'm not going to throw this away.

Mom starts breathing steadily next to me. I'm starting to think concretely about how to deal with this. I take my bike, I know it. It's one thing I'll miss walking around Knox on weekends like a mammal, dodging cars, trucks, and pickup trucks with protruding pipes, meeting Richard, and then locking bikes near the station. Metro to go to Christopher. Cycling is pure and simple – Richard says he thinks it's boys' biggest invention, and although I thought he was stupid at first, I'm not these days. More emphatic. My mom wouldn't let me take the bike to school, so I've never crossed a bridge – it will be my first time -. I don't think I'll wear my helmet.

I'll take the bike, and it's going to be a warm spring night. I'll speed up Flatbush Street – Big Knox Road – to the Knox entrance to the bridge, deploying potholes and cops overnight. They won't look at me twice, is it illegal, a child crossing a bridge on a bicycle? I'll go up the ramp and go straight to the middle where I was before, then I'll cross the bridge and take one last look at the Kenzoa Bridge.

But what am I going to do with my bike? If you lock him up, he will sit there on the side of the bridge, as a guide, and they will cut the lock or cut the chain after a while. It's an expensive channel! But if I don't lock it, someone grabs it quickly - it's a good bike, rally - and there will be no proof that I was there before.

I can't lose the bike, I decide. I'll take the key with me when I get down, and mom and dad will know where I was at the time. The cops will find the bike and tell them. It will be difficult, but at least they will know. It would be better than leaving anything.

What joy - right? Joy- stop for me. Since I can't sleep and I'm still sweating, I decided I could try something to hit: push-ups. I don't want to fall asleep, I just want to

feel a little exhausted and rested so that I can make the trip in time, in about an hour. I sit in bed in a convenient pump position, which is also a suitable sexual position, as I realize, and I have not even had sex - I will die a virgin. Does that mean I'm going to go to heaven? No, according to the Bible, suicide is a sin and I'm going straight to hell, what a gypsy.

I learned push-ups in Tai Po. I'm good at them. I can do them on my fingers and fist, as well as on the palm of my hand. Here, next to my mother, in a scene that will look very strange if we shoot it from the side, I start doing it up and down one, two, three ... I move very slowly so as not to wake up mom - she is a heavy sleeper and does not notice my exercises. His head is turned in the opposite direction. When I get to ten push-ups, I start counting: five, four, three ... Until I finish at fifteen. Rivers in bed.

I'm too weak to remember Cheerios only for the last twenty-four hours, I've been beaten. I'm cracked after fifteen push-ups. But I feel something in bed. I feel my heart beating. It pulsates on the bed, amplified, resonates not only in bed but in my body. I feel it in my feet, legs, stomach and arms.

Beating everywhere.

I return to the palm of my hand. One two three... My arms are burning. Gnashing my neck. The bed is not the best place to do push-ups; you tend to drown. This group is stronger than the previous one. But when I turn fifteen, I continue, until I turn twenty. I stretch out my hand and grab a grunt on the last one and empty on the mattress.

Uncle bath. Uncle bath. Uncle bath.

My heart is now pounding. Beats everywhere. It hits every point of my body, and I feel blood rushing through me, my wrists, my fingers, my neck. He wants to do it, so bad all the time. It's a stupid little thing, heart.

Uncle bath.

It feels good, the way he cleans me.

Uncle bath.

Screw. I want my heart.

I want my heart but my mind acts.

I want to live but I want to die. What do i do? Get out of bed, look at the clock. At 5:07 a.m. I don't know how I spent the night. My heart radiates a bad mood, so I wake up and drag into the living room and grab a book from my father's shelf.

It is called how to survive the loss of love. It has a pink and green cap. Sold like two million copies. It is one of the psychology books that children buy everywhere to overcome separation. My mother bought it when her father died and loved how good it was. She showed me the cover.

I watched it just to see what it was all about, and the first chapter said, "If you want to hurt yourself right now, go to page 20." And I thought that was pretty silly, like the book Choose Your Adventure, so I went to page 20, and there he said to call your local suicide hotline because the suicide pendants are in a medical and psychological condition to help.

Now, in the dark, I open How to Survive the Loss of Love on page 20.

"Every municipality has a suicide hotline, which is listed directly in the government services section on the yellow pages," he says.

All right. I go to the kitchen and open the yellow pages.

It's boring to find these government lists. I thought it was marked with green pages, but the green pages turned into a restaurant guide. Government lists are blue at first, but these are all phone numbers to see where to find your car if it is towed and what to do if your block has a problem with rats ... Ah, here, health. Attitude control, urgency, mental health. There are a lot of numbers. The first says "suicide" next door. It's a local number, and I'm calling.

I stand in the living room with my hands in my pants while the phone rings.

Party: 18

"Hello."

"Hello, is this the suicide hotline?"

"This is the Knox Anxiety Management Center."

"Oh, uh..."

"We work with the Samaritans. We handle calls from the Knox Suicide hotline

When overflowing. That's Keith speaking.

"So, the suicide hotline is too busy right now?" "Yes, it's Friday night. This is our joy." Giant. I'm even common to suicide.

"What seems to be the problem?"

"I really, just... I'm very depressed and I want to be killed."

"Ah huh. What is your name?"

"Ah... "Need a false name, need a false name: "Scott".

"And how old are you, Scott?"

"Fifteen".

"And why do you want to commit suicide?"

"I'm clinically depressed, you know. I mean, I'm not just... Depressed or whatever. This new school has started and

I can't stand it. It's reached a point where it was the worst it was ever and I don't want to deal with it anymore.

"You're saying you're clinically depressed. Are you taking medications? "I was taking Zoloft."

"And what happened?"

"I stopped eating it."

"Oh. Maybe that's a bad idea. Keith seems to be just starting with all these tips. I imagine a skinny college age boy wearing metal-framed glasses on a desk lit by a small reading lamp, looking out the window, nodding his head at the good deeds he is doing.

"A lot of kids have problems when they stop taking their medications."

"Well, whatever the reason, I can't really deal with it right now."

"Do you have a plan to kill yourself?"

"Yes. I was jumping off the Kinzoa Bridge. I hear Keith writing something.

"Well, Scott, we're not the suicide hotline, but if you will, we have a five-step exercise to manage anxiety.

Would you like to try?"

"Um definitely."

"Can you have a pen and a piece of paper?"

I go to the drawers in the dining room and take a pencil and paper. I take him to the bathroom and sit on the bathroom with Keith.

The lights are on.

"First, okay? Type an event that happened to you.

That you lived.

"Any event?"

"That's right."

"Okay..." I wrote on a pizza sheet I ate last week.

"Do you have it?" asks Keith.

"Yes."

"Now write, ah, how did you feel about this event." "Okay." I write I felt good, full.

"Now write down any 'should' or 'world' you felt about the event."

"Like what?"

"Things you regret, things you think would have improved the situation."

"Wait, ah, I don't think I have the right kind of events." I furiously erase my first statement, marked I. Instead of Ate Pizza, I put my mom's vomit pumpkin and then for 2, I write that I wanted to commit suicide, while I told Keith to stick, I messed up.

"Just write 'should' and 'will', reassures me.

Well, I should have carried the squash and I would have been full if I had that. I put it.

"Now just write down what you had to do at the event."

"What should I do?"

"Law. Because there are no things you should want in the universe.

"There isn't one?" I began to doubt Keith a bit. For someone in anxiety management, it gives me a confusing and worrying exercise. "No," he said. There are only things that could have happened differently. You don't have a duty or will in your life, you see? You only have things that could have gone in a different direction.

"Oh."

"You never know what would really have happened if you had done what you should have done and if you had done it. Your life could have been worse, right?"

"I don't see how it's possible, because I'm on the phone with you.

"What you have in life are needs, and you only have three needs: food, water and shelter."

And air, I think. And friends. And money. and your mind.

"So the next step in the process is to write down what you already had to do at your event only, and then compare it to the duties and commandments you set for yourself."

"How are the ~Sped~ steps in this thing?"

"Five. The fifth is the most important. There are four of us.

"You know, I really, ah-" look at the piece of paper, covered with half-scanned doodles on pizza and squash. "I think I should tell kids about the suicide hotline because I still really feel... bad." "Very good," Keith sighs.

I'm worried he thinks he did a bad job, so I tell him, "It's okay. I was helpful." "It's hard with young kids," he says. "It's hard. DID CALL 1-800-SUICIDE?"

1-800-Suicide! Of course! I should have known. This is America. Everyone has a number 1-800.

"This is the helpline, they are patriotic. Then there's local suicide surveillance..." Keith gives another number.

"Thanks." Write them together. "You're welcome, Scott," he says. I TURNED OFF - THESE ARE THE FIRST CALLS I MADE NOT ON A CELL PHONE IN A LONG TIME - AND TYPED IN 1800SUICIDE.

It's convenient that suicide has seven characters, I think.

"Hello," a girl replied.

"Hello, I..." I give her rap, just as I gave Keith. The name of this girl is Maritsa.

"So, you stopped taking your Zolof?" she asks.

"Yes."

"You know, you have to be on it for... A few months really."

"I was on it for a few months."

"Some children stay on it for years. At least four to nine months."

"Okay, I know, but I felt better."

"Well, how do you feel now?"

"I want to kill."

"Okay, Scott, now, you know you're too young and you look very witty."

"Thanks."

"I know high school can be tough."

"It's not that hard. I just can't handle it."

"Do your parents realize how you feel?"

"They know I'm bad. They're asleep now."

"Where are you?"

"I'm in the bathroom."

"In your house?"

"Yes."

"Do you live with them?"

"Yes."

"You know, when you want to commit suicide, we consider it a medical emergency. Did you know that?"

"Ah, emergency."

"If you feel like that, you need to go to the hospital, okay?"

"And to?"

"Yes, you go straight to the emergency room and they will take care of you. They just know how to deal with it." Emergency room?

I haven't been in the emergency room since I was cut off by a sled and went out into the park in elementary school.

Blood was coming out of one ear, and when I woke up it was as if I had been sleeping for three days and not quite sure of the year. They held me all night, sent me through MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) to make sure my brain didn't spring up and sent me home.

"Are you going to the emergency room, Scott?"

"Oh..."

"Do you want us to call 911 for you? If you can't get to the emergency room, we can send you an ambulance."

"No, no! That's not necessary." I don't need neighbors to see me leave. Besides, I never realized, but I'm next to the hospital. It is two blocks away - a tall gray building with large tanks of frozen oxygen in front and construction vehicles constantly adding new wings. UMPC Hospital. I can walk there from here. You may feel good. Once there, I won't have to do anything.

I'll just tell them what's wrong with me and they'll give me medicine.

Maybe they will give me some kind of new pill - maybe they invented a fast-acting Zoloft now and I'll go home directly. Mom and dad won't even know.

"Scott?"

"I'm going. I have to..."

"You have to get dressed?"

"Right."

"That's great. That's fantastic. You're doing the right thing."

"Okay."

"You're so young. We don't want to lose you. You're so strong now."

"Thanks." I find my shoes. No, pants first. I put on my khaki pants. The only shoe I can find is my shoes, which I wore at Dr. Ross's office this afternoon, a lifetime ago. It's rock port, shiny and beveled.

"Are you still there?"

"yes, I just get a hoodie." I pull it off the hook and flip it. Hold the phone again.

"Okay."

"You're so brave, Scott."

"Thanks."

"You're going to the hospital, right? Which hospital?"

"UMPC".

"They're great there. I'm proud of you, Scott. This is the right thing to do."

"Thank you Maritsa. Thank you."

He hung up the phone and walked out the door. Jardin comes caressing as I leave, and he turns his head at me. Does not bark.

Part: 19

The emergency room is almost deserted at half past five in the morning, I don't know how I got this lucky break. There is a long black metal seat with children. A Hispanic couple wandering, the girl howling around her knee. An old white lady and her giant son fill out the forms next to each other. A black boy in glasses sits at the end of the seat, opens the peanuts and puts the shells in his left jacket pocket, and the peanuts in his right. It can be an old doctor's office. Except for the peanut boy.

I walk to the main office: registration. There are two types of recording, one sitting, and one standing in the back. The person behind seems about my age, maybe you get school credit.

"I need to be, uh, recognized. registered", I say.

"Fill out a form and the nurse will see you soon," says the seated. The person standing stuffing the envelopes, my eyes. Do I know her from somewhere? I smell my armpit to hide my face.

I take the Xeroxed model that was delivered to me. He asks for my date of birth and address, my parents' names and phone numbers, and my health insurance. I don't know much about health insurance, but I do know that my social security number is my ID number, so I put it in. I feel kind of satisfied filling out the form as if I were applying to a private academy.

The form, complete, is placed in a small black tray hanging on the side of the registry desk. There is only one piece of paper in front of me. I sit next to the peanut boy. I stare at the ground. It's made of long red and white tiles, like a checkerboard, and I imagine how the rider moves across it. I'm so crazy. I lost it. This will not help. I have to leave. Is it too late? My bike came home in the hallway. I can do it. I'm strong enough.

"Darry's?" is a girl sticking her head out of a door at the end of the recording.

I'm standing. The Hispanic couple howls that they were here first and someone comes out to talk to them in Spanish. Sorry kids.

"Come," nod. "I'm a nurse." I shake her hand.

"Sit down." She entered her long, thin room, which had a computer, two chairs, a set of pipes and robes on hooks on the wall. The sun shines through a window at the end of the room. On the other side of me is a poster about domestic violence: If your son beats you, forces you to have sex, takes over your finances, or threatens you about immigration papers, you are a victim!

The short nurse with curly hair and a clown face reaches the hooks behind her and opens the sphygmomanometer. I always like these. Not that they're nice, but they always feel like they could be much worse. She attaches it to some readers and pumps me up.

"So, what's wrong?" she asks.

I give her the rap.

"Have you done anything for yourself? Have you tried and injured yourself. Have you tried to hurt yourself. Did you go anywhere?"

"NO - I CALLED 1-800-SUICIDE AND THEY SENT ME HERE."

"Good. It's nice. You did the right thing. They're so cool."

It opens me, transforms, types of information to the computer. It reads from my paper in a tray on the right of the screen, where I wrote "I want to kill" as the reason for my acceptance.

"Now, have you been taking the medicine?"

"Zoloft. I stopped taking it."

"Did you stop?" she opens her eyes wide. "We get that a lot."

She writes. "You can't really do that."

"I know." I'm glad I have something concrete to blame for this, something everyone can point fingers at. "You have to stop, now, and think about how you feel. I want you to remember how you feel next time - decide to stop taking the drug. "Okay." I stick to it in memory. I feel dead, wasteful, terrible, broken, useless. It's not the kind of feeling you forget.

"You're going to be fine, you chatterers," she says.

Look at what you're writing on the screen. Under the heading "Reason for Acceptance," you put suicidal ideation. That would be a good name for the band, I think. "Come on," she says, as she gets up from the computer. Behind it, the printer produces something, whining, clicking. She reaches back and pulls out two stickers, puts them on plastic bracelets that she tied to her belt, which resembles a nurse's belt and sticks them to my right wrist.

Look down. They both say Darry's Gellner and they have my social security number and barcode on them.

"Why do I get two?" I ask.

"Because you're so special."

She leads me out of the room to the appropriate emergency room, and the curtains of the past that are drawn alternately and unpainted to show the cast of characters here on an early Saturday morning. The vast majority of elderly children - specifically, elderly white women with tubes in them, screaming and whining. What they're screaming for is water.

"Waaa-taaa, waiata" - and what they get is ignored. Doctors - I think doctors wear white coats and nurses blue, right? - Step by holding the clipboard. One of them has a dirty young blonde beard that I would never expect to see on a doctor named Dr. Kepler. Maktoob is resident, so he is a college boy. That's one of the things I could be one day if I didn't make a mistake and get here. "This way," says the nurse.

Hyacinth sings to us. They come from everywhere, dozens of different types of loud, scary, dirty, random beeps. I wonder if they ever synchronized as we pass by two giant metal racks on wheels - inside pale yellow trays wrapped in plastic. Hospital breakfast. A nurse pushes them through a door marked FOOD PREP.

We move in front of a group of Hispanic boys relaxing on stretchers who all look like they're in the same bar fight. One has a bandage on his face, the other points to his chest to the doctor, and the other rolls up his pants to show what looks like a shark bite. The doctor whispers in his face in Spanish, rolling his pants down. We pass a bank of computers and there the nurse asks me to wait - pointing to an Indian doctor, and he takes a stretcher, which looks up close like a complex and very expensive piece of machinery, with red and black arms protruding everywhere, to a side room marked "22".

Room 22 is big enough to accommodate a stretcher. It has no door, only an entrance. The walls are yellow. The nurse leads me there.

"The doctor will be with you soon," she says. It is bright. Bright as hell. And I didn't sleep. I sit on a stretcher. What should I do here? There is nothing to do. There aren't even any hooks. Outside the age of 22, a black boy with a long panic on a stretcher next to a curtain. He's dressed well in dark brown with black shoes like mine and he's holding his hip and writhing in pain. It's something I've never seen before except in movies — a boy holding himself, frowning, swaying, breathing in small puffs, exposing his teeth and going "nurse, nurse, please." He looks like he dislocated his hip. He rolls on his side and then comes back on his back, but nothing seems to help.

Who is worse, soldier, you or him? I don't know, sir!

It's a tricky question, soldier.

Well, it is. 1 means that I am sitting here longing. He practically dies there. I was expecting more from you, son.

How?

You are a smart kid. You should be able to tell when someone is fake. And the soldier-

Yes.

-Good job there. I'm glad you're still on board.

I don't feel better.

Life is not about feeling better. It's about getting the job done.

Look again at the black boy. As I do, a senior police officer with close short hair and those strange little bumps on the back of his neck heads to the scene with a newspaper and a cup of coffee. He takes an orange plastic chair and sits right outside of me, between room 22 and room 21, another open-sized space the size of a closet.

"Hey, how are you," he says. He speaks slowly and calmly. "I'm Chris. If you need anything, let me know. He sits down and opens his newspaper.

The black boy is now moaning, tapping his eyes at every nurse passing by. He holds his hip with both hands. Maybe he is a heroin addict. They come to the hospital and pretend they were injured to get morphine. I watch it for minutes, trying to see if it's real or fake. There are no hours.

There are only beeps.

Chris shakes his paper. The second page is "108 stories down:

A boy drowns from the Empire State.

"Jeez," I say. I can't believe it. "Is this about a boy jumping out of the Empire State Building?"

"No." Chris smiles, looking at me over his shoulder. "Not at all." Turn the paper again. "You're not supposed to look at this."

I chuckle. "That's too much." "He lived!" says Chris.

"yes, right."

"He did! And you will do too."

Did someone tell this boy what I was in? Or are all children with mental difficulties transferred to room 14?

"What would he have done? Hit a tree?"

But Chris moved to page four. "We're not supposed to look at this."

Someone must have told him. He is a cop responsible for making sure things are okay in the emergency room and someone must have told him that he has a depressed child at the age of 14, and now he is trying to be helpful.

I lie on a stretcher, take off my hood, and throw it on my face. It's not dark enough. I won't be able to sleep. I'm sweating. I want to do push-ups, but I can't on a stretcher, and it's probably a bad idea to do them on the tiled floor, which doesn't seem to be wiped recently. You don't need to go to a UMPC hospital for depression and get out with diphtheria.

"Nurse! Nurse! Please!" moans the black boy.

Wow, Wow.

"Hey, what's up?" Chris answers his phone. "No, I'm on." A whistle, a sound thing.

These are the sounds of the hospital, the hospital, the hospital.

"Marhaba or Dariez?"

The doctor comes to 14. She has long dark hair, a boggy face and bright green eyes.

"Hey."

"I'm Dr. Data."

"Dr. Data?"

"Yes."

Huh. I want to ask her if she is Android, but that wouldn't be very respectful, and besides, I'm not up to that.

"What's going on?"

I give her the rap. -It gets shorter each time. I wanted to kill. I called the number. I came here. Blah, blah, blah.

"You did the right thing, a lot of kids stop their medication and get into big trouble," she says.

"That's what they tell me."

"Now, besides wanting to jump off the Kinzoa Bridge, did you have anything else going on? Have you been seeing things? Hearing things?"

"Nope." I'm not talking about the army boy. The same rules as with Dr. Garnernie.

"Do your parents know you're here?"

"Nope."

Part: 20

"Okay, okay, let me tell you what we can do for you, Dariez." She takes out her stethoscope, holds it in her hands, folds her short arms. She's beautiful. Her eyes are serious and beautiful. "It's Saturday, and on Saturday our best psychologists are here who are really good. I will recommend that you see Dr. Mahmoud.

He will come soon, and he will be able to provide the help you need. I have a surprising vision of Dr. Mahmoud taking me to his office, which is a private shrinkage office within UMPC Hospital. It should be very fun and naked. There is probably a black sofa, a wide window and some

Picasus... He'll take me there. We will have some emergency treatment. It will give me the kind of trick that Dr. Ross couldn't give me, affect the transformation, and redescribe me

Zoloft (maybe Zoloft is fast-acting!) ... And I'll be on my way.

I told him I love you.

But you want to know the secret of keeping any woman under your spell, do not let them take over?

"Sounds like a plan."

"Now, you have to tell your parents where you are because when Dr. Mahmoud comes down, he will need them to sign for you."

"Oh heh."

"Will this be a problem?"

"Yes."

"Will they be okay because you're here?"

I sigh. "Yes. I am the one who... Not."

"No, I can do that."

"Where are your parents?"

"Like two buildings away."

"They're together? Are they supportive?"

"Don't worry, this happens to a lot of children. It tends to be related to stress. Breathe for me, Dariez." She puts her stethoscope on my back and makes me take a deep breath, cough, and the whole deal. She doesn't have to hold my balls, which is great, because there is no door.

I look outside and she examines me. The black boy has a nurse leaning over him.

"Dr. Mahmoud will fall soon. Call your parents, please, and make sure they're here within two hours."

Two hours. God. Should I wait another two hours?

"Gotcha".

Dr. Datta nodded at me. "We will help you."

"Okay." I try to smile.

She comes out. I think that, with parents, I should get over it as soon as possible. I flip my cell phone. There is no service in the emergency room. I walk out of room 14 to find a public telephone.

Chris gets up from his chair.

"My friend, hey, I said hey, hey got asking me about things. What do you need?"

I turn and look at him, see his badge, and the sleeping stick. Realize what it is now. It's not there in general or for the emergency room. He's there for my protection. When you come to the hospital with a mental disability, they put a policeman next to you so as not to hurt yourself.

I'm on like, watching suicide. You want to commit suicide. You call 1 800 suicides; you get a suicide hour.

"Ahem, I have to call mom."

"Not a problem. The phones are out there. Ask for nine." He nodded.

Phones like, three feet away. But Chris puts his hands on his hips and watches closely as I pick up a receiver.

Hi mom, I'm in the hospital? No.

Hello, mom, do you sit down? What.

Mom, you won't believe where I call you!

Near.

"Hello, Mom," I say when I hear her moaning hello. "How are you?"

"Darry's! Where are you??! Just me - you just woke me up and you're not in bed! Are you okay?"

"I'm fine."

"Are you in Christopher?"

"Ah..." I suck air through my teeth. "No, Mom. I'm not in Christopher."

"Where are you?"

"I, uh... I freaked out last night, and I was really feeling bad, and I, um, checked UMPC Hospital.

"Oh my God." She stops, holding her breath. I hear her sitting and exhaling.
"You... Are you okay?"

"Well, I mean I wanted to kill."

"Oh, Darry's." There is no crying, but I hear her putting her face in her hands.

"I'm sorry."

"Nope. No! I am sorry. I was sleeping! I didn't know!"

"Please, mom, how do you know?"

"كنت أعلم أنك سيء ، لكنني لم أدرك ذلك. What did you do?"

How did you get there?

"Don't worry. I didn't do anything. I used your book."

"What, the Bible?"

"No, you how do you deal with the loss of a love book."

"Survival. How to survive the loss of love. Great book."

"I recommended calling the suicide hotline number there, and I did."

"Is this paper from the phone?"

"yes, you can get rid of that. They said you know... If I feel like I'm in an emergency, I have to come to the emergency room, put on my shoes and come here."

"Oh, Dariez, so you haven't done anything for yourself?"

"No, I scored."

I hear her breath pick up and I think, in my house a few blocks away, her hand on her chest. "I'm so proud of you." "You?" "This is the bravest thing I've ever done."

"I... Thank you."

"This is the most life-affirming thing I've ever done. You made the right decision. Je vous Ayme. You are my only son and I love you. Please remember.

"I love you too, Mom."

"I thought I was a bad mom, but I'm a good mom if I teach you how to handle yourself. You had the tools to figure out what to do. This is crucial. And they're going to

be great there. It is an excellent hospital. I'm coming right - do you want me to bring your dad?

"I don't know. It might be nice to have as few children as possible, if possible."

"Where are you now?"

"In the emergency room. They want you to sign some forms."

"Where are they taking you?"

"To speak with this doctor, Dr. Mahmoud."

"And how does it feel?"

"I don't know. Like everything is unrealistic. I didn't get any sleep last night."

"Oh, Darry's - if I knew... I didn't know..." Smile. "I love you, Mom. I have to go." Chris looks at me.

"I love you. I'm very proud of you."

I'm hanging up. My mom seems happier to be hospitalized than she did to high school. Beyond the chattering Latino patients lead me to a chrome bath and tiles that may have seen some bad procedures. It stays outside. I look around and think about how I'd kill here if I needed to—I'd have to crush my head in the toilet seat. Ouch. I didn't even see it in a horror movie. I look at the toilet and decide to stand. I will not sit like the battered scientist anymore. I stand up, push hard, wash my hands and get out.

"Wow, that was fast," Chris says.

We pass My-a Joy in room 21 on my way back. His hands are still crossed in his lap as Dr. Datta tries to ask him questions.

"I tell you once: it's the truth. You play this number, this number will come to you!"

The boy with panic still stumbles.

I'm lying down. A nurse comes with a stroller that threatens to get more food on it. She knocks — as if there's a door — and says she has to take her heart rate. This involves placing sticky tabs attached to wires all over my body. It doesn't hurt. I have a feeling they'll do it when they come out, though. I turned to the cart wearing it, a metal arm like a recording needle reading my beat. I watch it: rise, then flat rise, then retreat and repeat. That's you. This is your heart.

"Okay," says the nurse. It pulls tabs out of my skin. It does not hurt - the adhesive is gentle and soft. My tabs hang from the cart like a tangle of roots as they roll away. I lie and do nothing for a second, then put on my shirt again, then a hood. How long have I been here? I open my phone. Two and a half hours.

"Mr. Gellner?"

A boy in a dark suit and gray tie stands at the entrance to my room. It occupies it almost completely. It is large, barrel-shaped with a stately and pierced face, gray hair, large eyebrows and a strong handshake.

"I'm Dr. Mahmoud, yes? You feel how? Why are you here?"

I give him the rap.

"Are your parents here?"

"Jar, I called them but..."

"Here, well, thanks!" I hear my mom's voice in the emergency room. I put my head in my hand.

"It's here? Twenty-two?"

Dr. Mahmoud steps aside, and there's my mother, followed by the nurse who let me in, with a stuffed bag on her left arm and two jardans on her right.

"Miss!" the nurse screams. "You can't really own here!"

"Which?" mom asks, Jardin slips into the carrying bag.

He raises his head towards me and barks, then lowers.

Everyone in the emergency room is suddenly silent. Even the cracked boy with panic looks at mom. Chris approaches her. The nurse who let me in signals to me – "Wait a minute," says Dr. Mahmoud. "Mrs. Gellner?"

"Yes? Darry's! Oh my god!"

Everyone allows her to enter room 14. They spread out in a three-person semicircle and she hugs me tightly, the kind of hug she used to give me when I was five, complete with a wobble. Jardin is in my face.

"He had to come. It was making a stir. I love you so much," "Mom whispers in my ear, hot and full of spit.

"I know." I block it.

"Mrs. Gellner-"

"She needs to leave with the dog," says the nurse.

"She has? Dogs are against politics," Chris says.

"Just one second," says Dr. Mahmoud. We all look at him.

"Well, Mrs. Gellner, since you're here, your son has registered himself because of suicidal ideation and severe depression, do you understand?"

"Yes."

"He was on his Zoloft but stopped eating it." "Did you?" my mother turns to me.

"I thought I was better." I shrugged my shoulders.

"Stubborn like your father. Yes, doctor?"

"Well, the next question is for Dariez. Dariez, would you like to be accepted?"

Admit it. Maybe it means to the private room where I talk to Dr. Mahmoud. Quick visit and then I went. It will give me the feeling that I have accomplished something, that I have not weakened in the emergency room.

"Yes," I say.

"Good decision," says mom.

"Mrs. Gellner, you have to sign Dariez on this decision," says the doctor. He rotates his case, which he was holding in front of me, towards it. There is an awesome amount of very small writing in the top half of the page and even more so in the bottom half. In the middle, the equator of some kind indicates where you are supposed to sign.

"There is one thing," says the doctor. "At the moment, the hospital is undergoing renovations and we are very tight for space, so your son will be accepted with adults."

"I'm sorry, what?"

"It will be accepted with our adult patients, not with adolescents alone."

Oh, so I'll wait with the old kids to see Dr. Mahmoud?

"That's not a problem," I say.

"Good". The doctor smiles.

"Will it be safe?" my mother asks.

"Absolutely. We have the best care in Knox here, Ms. Gellner. Renovations are only a temporary condition."

"Okay. Dariez, you okay with that?"

"Sure. Whatever."

Mom puts her undecipherable signature on the paper.

"Wow. We'll have everything ready for you, Darry's, Doctor."

Mahmoud says. "You'll feel much better."

"Okay," shake his hand. He turns around and goes out, a large suit greets patients left and right in the emergency room. The nurse touches mom's shoulder. "I'm sorry, you have to go with the dog, ma'am."

"Can I give my son a bag of clothes?"

"What will I need his clothes for?" I ask. Look in the bag: not only there are clothes, not just clothes that I hate, but Jardin sitting on them.

"If you want to bring things for him, you can bring them to the hospital later in the day," the nurse replies. "Where will it be?" asks my mother like I'm not there.

"At six north," the nurse answers. "Just ask him."

Come on.

"I love you, Dariez."

"Goodbye, Mom."

A quick hug on her way - watching Chris with his hands on his hips. I'm really curious about his effectiveness as a hospital security guard.

"What is the six north?" I ask him.

"Ah, ah, we're not supposed to talk," he says and sits with his paper. I look out the door for some news, but everything is the same. As you know, this is a crappy place. I wish I wasn't depressed not to be here.

"Mr. Gellner?" someone finally asks. A new boy walks to the door, a thin boy, with a short beard, a hippie looks older - except without long hair - with glasses. He does not wear a white robe, a blue robe or a police uniform. He was wearing jeans, a blue-collared shirt and what appeared to be a leather jacket.

"I'm Polly. We are ready to welcome you now."

"There are two!" says a doctor as she passes. "Twenty-one and twenty-two."

"Well, I don't have papers for Mr. Twenty-One."

Polly shakes his head. "So, I'm going to take over Mr. Gellner, and I'm going to back down, okay? Hey, is this my joy!

"He's back," complains the doctor.

"Hey, it's Saturday, kid. Everything is going to be all right.

Mr. Gellner? He turns to me.

"Oh, yes."

"Are you ready to get out of this crazy place?"

"Will I see Dr. Mahmoud?"

'Sure. later in the day."

"Did you get this, Polly?" asks Chris.

"I don't think you're going to cause me any trouble, are you, Mr. Gellner?"

"Um, no."

"Well, do you have your stuff?"

I check my bracelets, keys, phone and wallet.

"Yes!"

"Let's walk."

I jump off the stretcher, nod to Chris, and follow Pauli at his slow pace through the emergency room. We open a door near the bathroom and pierce a seal in a completely different biome of red bricks in the hospital, indoor trees, posters of prominent doctors who practiced there.

Pauli leads me through a lobby to a bank of elevators.

He presses the button up, stands next to me, nods his head. I noticed a panel between the two elevators, showing us what was on each floor.

- Pediatrics.

- Delivery.
- Adult Psychiatry.

Oh, it would be in six north.

"Going to adult psychiatry, right?" I ask Paulie.

"Well" - looking at me - "You're not old enough for geriatrics." And smiles.

Elevator beats. We go in and turn, each of us takes a corner. Paulie leads me to the left when we get to six. I passed a poster with a plump Hispanic boy in blue robes holding his hand over his mouth: u healing in progress. then

Polly passes some kind of card in front of two double doors, opens the doors and we walk through them.

It is an empty corridor, wide enough for an adult boy to lie down with his arms outstretched. At the end are two large windows and a set of sofas. To the right is a small desk with a glass window with squares inches wide of thin wire embedded in it. Indoors, nurses sit at computers. Just outside the office, another hall branches to the right. I follow Pauli forward, and when we reach the crossroads of the two halls, I look at the hall on my right.

A boy stands there, leaning on the handrail lining the hall despite the lack of steps. The boy is short and stocky. He has eavesdropping eyes, a shattered face, and almost a rabbit but not quite. There is fluff sticking out of his neck and a large piece of black hair on his small head. He looks at me with the eyes of a homeless person, as if I had just stepped out of the ass and presented him with valuable paper clips from the moon.

Oh my God, it's beating. I'm in a mental ward.

I turned to Chris and noticed that the room next to him, Room 21, was now occupied. A black boy is there, sitting on a stretcher. He is bald, but not bald with a shaved head with thin white hair in a halo around him. His face is unclean. His arms lie on his legs in crossed objects. He is skinny, wearing sweatpants and a white shirt covered, from the neck down, with an unrecognizable dark spot. He turned his head towards the wall and I saw a scar running from his ear to his neck. Then he comes back to me. The only thing you can tell him is that he has all his teeth, which are white, and he smiles.

I go back to room 14 and go back to watching the boy with dread. He no longer writes. Apparently, the nurse gave him what he needed as he was sitting, his eyes closed,

his pants wrapped up to his knee, and scratching everything - down his leg, chest and face - muttering and swaying. Its scratches are mild and do not seem to be intended to relieve any kind of itching. He swings back and forth at a slow pace that matches the beeps and opens his eyes about a quarter of the way every minute.

Maybe this should be me. If I'm taking good medications, I probably won't have time to be depressed. It's heroin, isn't it? That's what I need: some heroin. But I reconsider. First of all, it will be very difficult to ask my friends: hey, who knows where I can get heroin?

They thought it was a joke. In addition, it has the worst nicknames: "Horse", right? How can I order a straight-faced "horse"?

And if I used heroin, I would be a depressed teenager on heroin. I didn't need to be those clichés.

"Would you like some breakfast?" asks Chris, and before I say no, one of the sad yellow trays is pushed into my face. The tray contains a pint of what appears to be oatmeal, a boiled egg ground in a Styrofoam pot with a lid, coffee (I can say because the lid is stained with coffee), a couple of orange juice covered in aluminum foil, and a piece of wheat bread individually sealed from the items.

Also, fork, spoon, knife, salt, pepper, sugar. This disgusts me. I have no interest in any of them. But they are probably watching me, so I open the bread and force it to eat slices by slices, chasing it with orange juice. I ask one of the nurses for tea and she brings me another coffee. I smell coffee but it smells very serious, so, just to annoy him, I offer some of it to Chris.

"I got my own," he says and holds a worldwide famous brand of coffee. It is strange to see brand names in the hospital.

As Chris Yak on his cell phone (I would like to know which company is providing you with the service here; they would like to use it in a commercial: a boy behind padded walls, "Can you hear me now?"), Dr. Datta returns models for me to sign my age and residency. She also brings forms to the older boy next to me, who is in room 21.

"How are you, Joey?" she asks. She has to speak very loudly.

"I said Ja: It's about Ya!" shouts again in a terse Southern voice.

It makes tsk-tsk noise. "How did you get back here, Joey?

We didn't think we'd see you for long."

"I, I, woke up, and the bed was burning."

It is very clear at this point that mom will be late. Maybe you're trying to pack me an activity bag. I should get some sleep. I crashed on a stretcher with my hoodie wrapped depressed over my head, but there is also a way ~Sped~ thoughts in my mind. What am i going to do? He started beating me there. I'm in the hospital. I'm supposed to do things tonight. There is a party - a big party - in Christopher's house. Will I be able to go? And if I don't go, what would I say? And what is the alternative? Will I stay at home and try to work but can't and end up having another sleepless night? I can't spend another night sleepless. How do you know if you've reached the bottom? A real bottom involves being on the street, I think, not in the hospital. But cycling has started and I can't handle it and it looks like a bottom. I sit down, throw a hoodie.

"Can I use the bathroom?" I ask Chris.

Then we ran for her and me-

I wanted to:

Before me my little sister.

Kissing my father.

Make with joy.

Make more with it...

She and I got what we needed to live... Me who was her death to me!

Darry's and Joey - they were forever happy, sort of...

I do - and her mother and father blame me ...

However, they think that she is still alive, and yet she has a known life here and there, and yet she is one of us, and now she looks at Joey, who is her angel on earth and studies magic with us.

Interval: 2

Ash Angel

Part: 21

You were left behind-

"One death will not change the mind of the world, I don't want to be the last behind him Sorry mom - I didn't want it that way, but what good is life, if it never changes?"

You, like me, can't deny the life you live... As it was sometimes - I try to rhyme, about being left behind - and just like you girl - I know you have, let everything come out. I stay tied up with bands,, I walk in school and see them all, I want to be calm, but I'm an idiot, I'm so lame, and they're so cool, I just want to drown the ass in the Barnesboro pool.

Talking is covered with mud, now blood, making a tear flood, and I go to my table, laughing at me as if I were fasting from the navel. So, I wake up in the morning, only I see the old man snoring, only to see my only friend, there is no one ... These teachers, I break their wrists and clench a fist and push the children into their closets, look at me you will never think that I will do such a crime, and yet I was left behind.

"So, you hate me, and I hate you - and you don't know, just what I'm going through, and you get love, and I hate, don't ask for forgiveness, because it's too late."

~ Darry's ~

(Back to where Nadalin said I was taking her...)

"Somewhere in this world, little fans would go up and down on something big girl, like this here, in her room, and yet, it wasn't worth losing her she told him ... I blame you, and it's just a stick that's not, that's it and she's holding it after intruding on her room - so-o and even so-o, she's a 14-year-old girl, who has never sinned in her life, and God spread on the cross, so even if we sinned, he wasn't seen as bad, that was why he did... So what does that say... She does nothing wrong – by being – a girl. Young girls have a feeling that needs to ...

The big man was crying like a baby at her feet... Thinking Dariez, may not make her come back...

She said "And you want to say that oh e so oh holy, as a man you're not I know you were looking at this girl while she was naked in her bed collapsing so, mister you want to say you're not a sinner, I know you did it, I know you're angry about it, on the truth, I think and I feel like your penis wasn't the first inside her, and I know your feelings for her, and you want to say she has a sin More than you, master of your fault.

I have to leave you - I have to... I wanted more for her and then her guys sucking just to live after she was 18 years old, dancing on bars, just to make her, for food and a piece to lie her head, at night, working in some bar dump like I did when I was a girl - I

want her more than a man like you, saying what she could and couldn't do when it was her life and her body... And even her soul! And I'm glad for it, I'm doing what you did now, I understand you're wrong...

At that moment, the glass of wine that Aunt Margaret May was holding in her hands burst, losing control, and she remembered her days as one of them too. Fragments of glass flew in every direction and Aunt Margaret May littered with words that were not words and blinked repeatedly, her face blushing, as she remembered her powers.

Margaret May!

Aunt Jinath screamed.

Margaret May , are you okay?

-Then-

Not to worry, and Aunt Margaret May snorted, wiping her face with her head, showing the skin of the belly button. And he must have pressed it hard. I did the same another day for Colonel Phipster, and the plate moved and broke. No fuss , Jinath, I have a very strong grip ... On this one ... She was proud of a new glass of wine, and was about to put it down, and she did it afterwards.

Aunt Jenneth and Uncle Richard Reed were looking at Naddalin suspiciously - they returned for the long weekend, when she made the glass of wine go in the opposite direction, from when she crashed again to being in her hand - proving herself, saying whispered words as in slurs, so she decided that it was better for her to skip the candy and escape from the table as quickly as possible, before calling the evil child - again.

(Back in school, it's Tuesday, and that sounds like Monday.)

Outside in the hall, she leaned against the wall, breathing deeply. It's been a long time since I lost control and made something explode. Naddalin knew she was doing it.

She couldn't let it happen again, this time she was in her bed, and she made it look like it was all to her, but she knew better.

The - Claepsara, Skoufyceol of Wizardry and the Fallen, form was not the only thing at stake, Dariez was too, such as - if she continued like this, she would be in trouble with - the magic office.

Naddalin was still a witch and an underage angel, and the wizard's law forbade her to do witchcraft outside the village of Haivanahul.

The log wasn't quite clean either. Just last summer, I got an authorized warning that said quite clearly that if the office got any more magic in Privet Drive, Naddalin would face dismissal from school.

I heard their desk all leaving the table and hurried upstairs out of the way. Nadalin got through the next three days by forcing herself to think about the do-it-yourself ward's care booklet Whenever Aunt Margaret May started on it, it was more like homework but not, it was kind of fun even to read about. It worked relatively well, although it gave it a glazed look, for the reason that Aunt Margaret May began to express her opinion that she was emotionally poor.

Finally, finally, the last evening of Margaret May's stay arrived, after a long time, right?

Aunt Jinath cooked a sumptuous dinner and Uncle Richard Reed unscrewed several bottles of wine. They passed by-consommé and her-salmon without solitary mention of Naddalin's mistakes. During the lemon meringue pie, Uncle Richard Reed got bored with the long talk about Sterling's, the ongoing mining company in the village of Alverda, just after Carrollton. Then Aunt Jinath made coffee for Uncle Richard Reed, give him the paper, and carry a bottle of brandy, Your only grandfather did it in the back road when his name was Shiaz, But somehow below the line, his last name was forgotten, and your grandmother Ya Su many years back with bread for her maiden name.

Also, Can I seduce you, Margaret May?

-And-

Aunt Margaret May had already had a lot of wine, and she was stuttering in her speech. Her huge face was very red. Then just a small one, then, laughed like a little schoolgirl. And a little more... Besides a little more... This is the ticket.

-Also-

Darry's was eating the fourth slice of pie, and Aunt Jinath was sipping coffee with her little finger sticking out of the handle. Nadalin wanted to disappear into the bedroom, but she met Uncle Richard Reed's angry little eyes and knew she would have to sit down.

Moreover, Aunt Margaret May said, "Ah," rubbing her lips, on the edge of the glass, and putting the empty crystal brandy glass back. And Knoush is excellent, Jinath.

"It's usually a normal long day for me, in the evening, with twelve kids of mine or not running to take care of..." She burped richly, patting the dog on her lap. However,

this is what I like to do is cook, clean and take care of the little ones. However, I love to see a healthy girl, and she was - she continues, winking at Dariez, how she was running, while others behave too young for her real age.

... And you will be a prophesied lady, like your father - and most importantly.

"Yes, I will have a more brandy place, read ... Thank you!

-Also-

In turn, now - she is one there - at that moment, she shook her head at Naddalin, who felt her puppy's nails cling to her skin from her freshly shaved legs - grate more wounds ... She muttered, holding her hands from the books in all that is magic, she quickly thought, to wake up and then the puppy fell asleep on her lap, and it was nice.

Nadalin was trying to remember the fourteenth page of the book: Magic to Cure Unmotivated Inverters.

At that moment when she saw blood dripping from her legs, she thought it was ... Everything comes to red blood - right? She was bleeding again, as I was saying - another day - about my work. Rotten blood will come out itself...!

Now, I'm saying nothing against your family, you patted my skinny Aunt Jinath with a blow, besides saying something like, your cousin is a bad egg, this magic you're looking for is the devil, look at this card, it's an old set of cards that your grandmothers were, and yet it made her go crazy looking at them more than seven times a day, I think they were helping her, finding her way, when It was all an illusion with a fifty and fifty chance of probability either way, for what you wanted to believe.

Naddalin got up and turned her eyes and said, ", " "They show up in her best families too, they are charity cases that are downloaded for free, or the fact that they are simple." Then I ran away with a vulgar and here is the result right in front of us.

-Behind-

Nadalin was staring at the plate, a funny ringing in her ears, and then she would hear the sounds - even if she was holding her ear and sounding rude to them, it was not their voices in her head, but them - you know them.

I - hold my owls firmly, I thought, and I run, as if you have problems with my daughters, go to the bathroom and let them talk to you Think in your mouth - were they here You are in this mind, body, and soul alike, linked like, it's the trade that wanders in your body that is truly yours but is no longer so, in life - and knowing that you don't They - and you don't know who they are - they, and they can kill, By moving your body to say,

if they want to – and not remembering the way and place, and making it look like death or self-harm, it makes you look crazy no? However, they understand, 4 voices, and one power on me. All the time, it never ends, chatter - chatter - shout and whisper too.

But she - could not remember what happened next, even if it was said - she would, even if she said to do this or that if she did or they did for her, she was very confused, it was not her mind - nor her character, character, nature, behavior, disposition, and most of all her temperament.

Aunt Margaret May's voice sounded as boring to her as one of Uncle Richard Reed's exercises.

Alongside her, Aunt Margaret May said loudly, picking up the brandy bottle, tightly and spraying it into the bottle more in glasses, she was swinging around so drunk that she was spraying on the blue and white tablecloth, and you never... Ever - never - like tell me what he did for a living?

'... And now I know," she stuttered.

-And-

Uncle Richard Reed and Aunt Jenath looked very nervous. Darry's even looked out of her pie, and that was great for her to do that when it came to sweets, to stare at her parents.

At that time, it wasn't working, as I thought, Uncle Richard Reed said, with half a look at Naddalin, who was still unemployed, and in her second year of what would be a high school for an ordinary girl of her age, and yet she is very mental - right? '... To do the functions of a Negro race, (the pejorative term for the type or action of a black or dark-skinned person), blacks used to do for whites, "I can see it, you still have the Confederate flag hanging from your balcony," Naddalin said, blushes with all the false slanders that have been said. "Dear silence - they even know how to rub the floor on their hands and knees, unlike you and your faint ways."

"I'm sure you spent a lot of time on... On your knees that's it...!" said a smiling Naddalin.

-And-

And as I expected, "I" is the bad girl - "I" is not the bad girl!

Then she said, Aunt Margaret May, takes a huge squig from brandy and wipes her chin, looking for an inappropriate, just after Naddalin's pun .

And no account, worthless, lazy intruder who-

-And-

And she was not, Naddalin suddenly said repeatedly, with her famous saying.

The table was incredibly quiet, Naddalin was shaking everywhere, with her ass and ass chewed completely, all the things that were said, about others, races too, intelligence, to others who didn't match - leaving her for sex - just thought she did, you know what kind of everything is - running in the mouth, however, he said nothing, to get away.

She never felt angry in life, but she was the only one, which was every name in the book.

There are many for or for the law in a lawless country, wondering why police officers are being shot, they won't do anything about it – it's all a slander for you and me, and I'm sorry because it's for minorities that have always felt as if I were one.

I had to google ...

Part: 22

Bill of Rights:

"Mom Kai-"

The United States Constitution contains 27 amendments.

"Wow, I thought... The first 10 amendments to the Constitution are called the Bill of Rights? The Bill of Rights was approved, or in 1791, and I care why? However, it is said - it defines the fundamental rights and freedoms of American citizens, or hum certainly does it.

We girls of this book feel this way-

Amendment 1

The First Amendment protects the rights of every American. It defines the freedoms of religion, expression and the press. Most Americans believe that the First Amendment guarantees their most important rights.

- "Speech - I would say that this is a good thing, but when do you draw the line, here I would like to say to the law policeman in my hometown who has his area, and cannot read the book that states the law in which they say they flock when doing you for example: call some retards on their faces, more than ten times, when do you do something about it? Who do we blame for, you blame me the bad girl right?

- "Journalism - these days will only be crap on Facebook and the internet, right? Don't read the worlds of news and news defamation of each other until they are harassed, intimidated, stored, hung on a rope... Others call another gay, meaningless things like that, which is not true after they are believed in the fact that they only have a second-grade education - but what do you expect when they are asked to be happy that they have it ... And post lines of text, not even words or sentences.

- "Religion - what is it? And even if you have one, oh my god - don't say or blow your head, and you will anger the atheist and get a long speech about evolution ...

"Yes, that simply sums it up in a small town in Pennsylvania."

Amendment 2

The Second Amendment guarantees Americans the right to bear arms or own guns.

- "Guns - that's why you can go to school with an AK-47 weapon and spray for fame, but I don't blame you because you don't have an education, on others who say you can't handle it. And they don't have a law - yet, again to say you can't wave a gun at me, it's their right to do so. It is every man for himself, it makes me start with women's rights and how there is none. They will not give you a pencil, because - like your education system does not have money, and yet perhaps they will allow you to get a weapon, so you can blow them in their heads for not teaching you anything, not having enough wetness about you to know anything better, only in "America ..." And spell it, ah - you can't, other interrupts laugh at us!

Amendment 3

The Third Amendment prohibits the government from forcing citizens to shelter soldiers in their homes.

- "What?"

"And... This should not matter - and why? And I say this - on the fact that we do not understand any world wars anyway, nor the children, with whom I want to study before, I left there forever, finding a place where they would care about girls and their ideas. And at this point, you say this "gay" and stop reading! It's all nonsense, and I don't care ... And say that this everywhere has not left any child behind... Behave!

"Yes... Yes! ... However, it should be

Be us - we - you and me, to be

Guilty until proven

Innocent?

Amendment 4

The Fourth Amendment protects the privacy of U.S. citizens.

- "Such as taking a picture is now a felony, for some and not for others. More than and - and or, being the director, privacy there is no such thing ... I'm sorry if your someone, who was or is stored like a celebrity, before leaving this world! It prohibits or prevents unnecessary or unreasonable searches of a person's property - certainly - certainly does.

Amendment 5

In the Fifth Amendment, all Americans are guaranteed the right to a fair and lawful trial. It also protects anyone from testifying against themselves under oath.

- 'Um-mm- I don't think it's for a moment - freaking time. More like - by 12 residents of their town, who hate you for you, say this and that, all the lies think that there is too simple to think of, and yet they make her even be the bad girl, or paid by a school to silence ... Just for example... So if you're like me and I know you are - you're guilty until proven innocent! If you're like me, you don't have a trial, it means you should be happy that we don't take you away, for what you are, more pressure on what has never been secret, a section there is no god for children my age, so - go suck something long and hard. Then make its population 3000 say everything they need and your F*CKED! They think you can't read, write, spell or do math with fingers and toes, and press releases make you more than just stupid shit - the guy standing behind the desk with a hammer rolls his eyes at you and says don't waste my time, funny not like he could be your school principal or something.

"They say - "I lost my mind, at this point -" and yet I have something to say again, "I didn't have one to lose - so there is..."

Amendment 6

The right to a speedy trial is guaranteed by the Sixth Amendment.

"It's like and flapping your penis at me, hitting the door, if you can find it, without help!" "Look - see that singing there will say exit - in red - it shines, just so you know!"

Amendment 7

- Seventh Amendment

The right to trial by jury is guaranteed in civil or private cases in which damages exceed \$20. Civil cases resolve disputes between citizens.

"Well, that's all in my city - the card I have to play, but there is no time - someone like me ... I already know when police officers are independent and say and do - what they want to say and do, the system is rigged within the names of cities - and county names remain, of which I am a part and - and/or suits that can give me to tell the facts. Good luck..."

Amendment 8

The Eighth Amendment prohibits unreasonable bail or fines and cruel and unusual punishment.

"Is this English...? I don't know what this says, so I'll consider it disrespectful as you do too - if you're my age. "Nope, sit down and rot is what you got, just like her and she too, and maybe you too."

Amendment 9

- The Ninth Amendment recognizes that Americans have rights not listed in the Constitution.

"And that's it and that's what it is now?"

"In 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment gave women the right to vote ... "Yes happy to see that we have something."

Amendment 10

The Tenth Amendment states that powers not granted by the Constitution to the United States government belong to the states or people.

And the labor law ha, that a joke makes nothing, you get angry if you can find work, with your background of nothing, and make the elderly say that you are a waste of life when you can't make a change. You must be certified or have a certificate but get one... Making Big Macs is what they say to do, or if you have a smart and knowing where

the money is internet nudes, I deserve more... Or hitting the military table, dropping out of school, or doing what you killed yourself as my school counselor said.

"I disagree... And maybe these are some of the issues when they are all fighting with the man in power." The world is an unfortunate disgrace to the land and the people of the United States of America."

"Yes, I'm moving to Canada..."

Part: 23

Another chapter in my life book

... And more brandy!

... And more than being the bad girl what did you do...

... And they start that and your fault...

... However, they only see what they want to see...

... However, this is my life, not just the house around the city too...

... Then Uncle Richard Reed shouted , who was very white in body and face.

I emptied the bottle into Aunt Margaret May's cup, I knew that if they kept drinking, someone would stab their face with a small pocket knife. It starts with love and ends with emotional hatred, and then we girls bear the brunt of the stabbing in other ways, snarling at Naddalin, saying-

'Go to bed!' ... Go on!

-And-

No, read, I said, I'm not a little girl, but that's when he said - "And yet you have one mind going to your room right now." "But-bo-t... Dread - you hiccups ... Go and cry to the dead mother and father, and we all know, you have no right to be more than a child ... And treat it as such!!! Aunt Margaret May, raising her left hand, said reliably. Her blood-congested little eyes are fixed over Naddalin's eyes, and she looks at her as if she can kill. Her little eyes benefit, but they retreat to be a strong girl, you know her inside... She was even if, she said no so o repeatedly.

"Come on, girl, to bed."

Naddalin - Proud of your parents, should you, girls, be there only worthless alcoholics! They will kill themselves in a car accident and they are drunk, one of these days you will see, well, like a girl I knew she did...

-And-

"And they - like the girl, did not die in a car accident, otherwise she would not have been here!"

Naddalin - "You don't know half of what you think you're doing!" ... She found herself on her feet in front of them all as if it were a civil court case.

Hmm - "You didn't die in a car accident and finally understood something obvious and came back, you nasty little liar!"

Look - look and now I left you to be a burden to them - mm - mm - mm, hardworking relatives, taking in the garbage of the stupid donkey, who cannot read writing or spelling, with her special needs program!

Then Aunt Margaret May screamed, swollen with violence. Besides - you rude ants 'Yah, ungrateful little brat.

-And-

But Aunt Margaret May suddenly stopped talking. For a moment, it seemed as if words had completely let her down. She looked like swollen, some with indescribable anger - but she - the swelling did not stop, in her readable face. Her astonishingly inflamed face began to swell until she lost air, her little eyes protruding as if possessed, her mouth stretching all evil like, and like a fare very tightly to speak - the next extra moments passed and after that, she opened several buttons To breathe, as if broke from her old sacred jacket, which clung to the high heavens, like a dog's, her smelly urine and the woman. And she looked from the walls, she was firing gas, and it was horrible. And I did what they finally said or I was completely gassed—like a girl in a concentration camp, killed by the "smell," so I left the room—and when I wave my hand back and forth a little of my perfect little nose.

Margaret May...!

She was screaming for Uncle Richard Reed, and Aunt Jinath together as Aunt Margaret May's whole body began to rise from the chair towards the ceiling, I could see that Darry's had found her inner strength, she had enough too.

She was perfectly plump, but more than before, and everyone in the room was under her cast—however, Darry's was overpowering her, now, with her hands, and then

her feet strangely hung as she floated in the air, making angry blast sounds until her head exploded all over the walls—like a broken penyatta filled with candy. With brains and goo— everything was scattered, and the puppy began to like it - if it was their candy. - And-

No, Ooo.

-Also-

That night after she and I felt so comfortable that Darry's and I cut off together and bought a great little house, all white on the inside with all the things the girls would also need in the loft bedrooms, for both us, to live, nice and more space than you think at 20 × 20 inches and put it in the backyard, also Victorian. It's time to get my place, but not too far, but far ... Next to the old paths, under the tree, this is longer.

There's nothing more beautiful than a girl's pussy full of c*mming and she's dripping it, I can see Dariez for my room, it's okay, she's a girl and a cute one in it... Everything these days with girls is open what not, what is dirty about the girl's body feeling good and feeling good - ask?

(Back)

Uncle Richard Reed grabbed one of Margaret May's feet and tried to pull her body down from floating in the headless air, however - elevated from the ground herself. A second later, the puppy sank forward on her and began to lick her more than before, lowering her teeth into Uncle Richard Reed's leg , when he tried to pull her out of her.

Naddalin tore as she ran out of the dining room before anyone could stop her, heading for the small hole under the stairs. The hole door magically burst when I got to it, I think that might be the last time I see it. Within minutes, she had thrown the trunk to the front door.

She ran upstairs and threw herself under the bed, putting her hands on anything she could say was mine—to take without saying about this or that isn't, twisting the loose floorboard, grabbing all the pillow cover from her bad too though it's in her book-filled belongings—which she hasn't read yet, and Christmas gifts too, for others, not for them—and yet they haven't really given her anything, over years - it took as long as you could.

I wriggled, grabbed Baby Raven's empty cage, rushed downstairs to her trunk, just as Uncle Richard Reed burst out of the dining room, her leg in tatters, I get my place, I take this little girl with me too, I don't say anything or I'll run away with her, and you get paid for it - why all that when I say what's going on here.

"Oh, no, come back here now - I say!" shouted - "Come back, I'll fix it with you."

But a rash rage came upon Naddalin, and Naddalin pulled her holding Dares' hand, and in a harder way ... saying you wouldn't live a life like that... She kicked the torso open, pulled out her wand, pointed it to Uncle Richard Reed, and charmed her to believe that this was all right, saying it was for the best - trust me, you don't want a life like a girl I once knew - she looked a lot like me, she was saying as they woke up on the tracks Naddalin on the left rail and Dariez on the right, to the city hand and the hand tied in the middle, the sun's rays shining on her at sunset.

-And-

(Even the point of going to town, where she said we would have a home, when we weren't at school, and she magically showed three grands in her hand, saying look, as they walked to a place where they made houses, to order, Naddalin using a quick spell forward, she made a week pass with them, to be there through the night.)

Naddalin said, and she deserves it, right, so she doesn't feel bad about it, and she breathes incredibly fast. You will deserve what you will get.

"You're always walking away by my side."

-And-

Naddalin - she - looked behind her for - the door latch, to their cute new little house, which was kind of indentated, to a corner, with windows wrapping around it. And I'm going, Naddalin said, coming? And I've had enough excitement for a day... Yes.

-Also-

Then the next moment, she was on the dark and quiet street, lifting the heavy torso behind her, with the Baby Raven cage under her arm.

Well, Dorezblumd finally said, and it's that you have a new home - then, I'll document this event for our records.

We have no business staying there... Here in the backyard with this house, even if ...

We may also go ... In and have celebrations, the first meal.

It was funny to see the land growing before my eyes - Darry's thought - in this 50 × 100 inch plot and their house inside it, and - in size that didn't exist before and yet it was magical now it made Naddalin speak with her wand which also made them think by accusing them of a spell that it was a line of acquiescence this was something they just

had and needed to pay for and they were just given the land - which was There is stunned - there, so in front of their house now the owners, and there is nothing they can or will do about it.

-Also-

Besides saying "yes", and then in a very muffled voice, in faith. And I'll take the bike back, you don't need to work anymore at your age as stupid as a paper deck for \$1.50, over the summer, just to give them everything.

G'night, Professor Pattergerl - Professor Dorzblumd, sir, now back in school, with all the children gone, he was very quiet - very quiet.

At once she wiped the tears flowing from her eyes on the sleeve of her jacket, looking at her new home and room, which was a big step in her filthy world.

Then she swung on the bike, it wasn't her, she said I'd go give him this now and come back, and then kicked the 1921 engine;

Beyond that, that's it - I'll see you soon, I expect ... "Yes, yes," she said with a sweet smile. Professor Pattergerl knew this and so did Dorzblomed, nodded for permission to do so, for me to take care of her, etc., everything was approved.

Professor Buttergirl blew her nose in response, saying—"Awe that's sweet—isn't it, looking around the little house."

Dorezblumd turned around and walked back to the street, where the two girls said keep this nice and were fine with him, you girls need a stable home burial. In the corner, I stopped and took out the outside light, as the lights were about to blink. It was now nightfall, it was off, Dorezblumd didn't want to see it, clicked on it once beforehand, and fourteen balls of light returned to their street lamp pole. So this tree-lined corridor that suddenly glows orange, as it has been doing for many years, can make someone a shadow swinging around the corner at the other end of the street.

(Forward)

Dorezblumd - can only see - a pack of blankets on - the fourth step, for them now also keep as a gift, there was a drive to the train car, for them to go home, now that the girls are set. And good luck, Nadalin, mumbled, because they were all next to the train to set off. She turned her heels as they climbed the stairs to the car, and with a rustle of Dorezblumd's robe, they got inside, overtaken by steam from the wheels, and whispered around as the train walked away.

A breeze disturbed the old tree with plant life in shades of exposed like greens of angular oak leaves, which would sway and hang on the edges, in a light gust of breeze, in the dark, illuminating a magnificent spectacle, with branches that lie on the ground, covering in many directions, with moss. On the shade-covered path that shows the shapes of all the leaves as they dance, and the tall green grasses that were muted and arranged underneath—the inked blue sky, the last place you would expect amazing things to happen.

Naddalin - she rolled inside her blanket without waking up, which is strange for being a light sleeper, but this new blanket made her feel safe for a reason.

Knight said that Dariez—one of her little hands closed on the letter next to her, apart to add to her life book, like the story of another chapter in her life book, and slept on it hoping to have dreams to add to it more beautiful than reality, without knowing that she was—was special, even if it was. Like and then you don't know that she - she will be famous Naddalin, you don't know that she - she will wake up in a few hours ... We go back to where magic, magic and fairy tales are the only thing that matters. Natalie screamed as she opened the front door to put out the milk bottles, seeing her remains lying in the yard ... After the head burst ... She barely wished a wish in her mind and time was moving forward, with the light distorted, by that time, Mr. S, had come out of the castle we were there walking towards, and the long weekend was over.

And she won't have to spend the next few weeks pushing and pinched by her cousin Alisha ... He wanted to sleep in the new house, maybe it was a day after he felt that time was moving slower.

She could not know that, as at this moment, individuals secretly gathering around the country were raising their glasses and saying in almost silent voices:

To Naddalin - the girl who survived!

-And-

When she passed the door to the living room ... Naddalin glimpsed Uncle Richard Reid and Dariez, and he was sticking out her ribbon in her hair, gently trying to get back with her, and yet he never succeeded.

She had just reached the top floor when the doorbell rang, and Uncle Richard Reed's angry face appeared at the foot of the stairs. Naddalin was several streets away before collapsing, on her way back to her new home, panting from the effort of moving everything belonging to two girls from her home to her new home. She sat completely still, still rising through her anger over everything, listening to her frantic beating once Hart.

But after ten minutes or so alone in the dark, mysterious street, a new emotion overwhelmed her mind, body, and soul in fear, more than any fear she had in the past days. Either way - you looked at it, you were never in a worse solution - never.

She was stranded, completely alone, in the dark world of non-magical people, with nowhere to go or run away, but she felt as if she needed to run - and yet there was nowhere to go everything in her mind was sounds. Besides, it was the worst of all, she had a serious charm in her mind, she didn't know to use this in this world, which is why she was feeling the way she was? This means that she was kicked out of the girls' school, for doing what she did, and yet everything was fine, she knew when they got back on the train, so why were all the characters in her head saying that it was MISS-ie's fault.

She broke - advertisement - the shackle of youthful magic fiercely, surprised that the magic office associations did not pounce on her as they stopped her behind. Naddalin trembled, fell as she walked towards the new house, for her and for the girl, she was taken under her wings and looked at the crescent moon wondering if her life was ending, above all, that this was her fault. Was her life ending now to save hers, she wondered and thought ...?

What would have happened to her?

Wow, wow, what a surprise...

Part: 24

Will she be caught, or will she simply be banned from the wizarding world, forced to die so that she can live?

Somehow I thought it would happen because she fainted...

She thought of Ginger and Emma, Emma the most, as her life and past flashed ahead quickly and yet she is also slow... And her heart trembled, in the body she now possessed on this earth, and yet she felt as if less, and then before she fell to her feet more.

Naddalin was sure that Ginger and Emma, whether she was a criminal or not, would want to help her now, life, but they were outside, they returned, and as Baby Raven went, she had no way of contacting them here as she was lying on the aisle. She didn't have any money either... Even if she was able to get somewhere, or even return to the small house, it seemed that everything she had was far from her.

There was little otherworldly entertainment money in her bag that was in her box if she could get the strength to get there. But - what was left of her fortune - it was her parents who left her, she left it stored in a basement in the magical Buchanan Bank in

Pennsylvania, a week ago she knew all this, links to their world through teleportation pipes, people not money - to their inheritance, inside large tubes go down, but with a whizz of reddish-pink wiping an addition to safety, that backlight, like an aquaplaning to the underworld, was from banking. She could never pull the trunk to Pennsylvania, "Until now, she was going to get more money than she knew what to do with it... When she came of age, she was in this body ...

Unless... I passed it ... I do not know... She looked at her hands with all the strength she had before, a wing inside her feeling like they were dying and about to fall. Which was still holding hands, falling feathers, gray hair, blood covered. If she had already been expelled (now the heart was beating painfully fast, as if she were mortal again). More magic can't hurt ... Right?

Part: 25

She was - having an inconspicuous neglect in the first place to hide from everything around her, she was - inherited from her father, who was smart in choosing it over all the others, what if she was enchanted? Neglect also made her feel close to her late father, and a ribbon was tied to her wrist, and that was all that covered herself until she returned. No one would have helped here in Pennsylvania. Then she can take the rest of the money out of the cellar and ... Only if she had the mind and strength at this very moment. An outcast who begins her life as always and always, weekly.

It was a terrifying panorama, to think that this might be her last day of days, for life ... But she couldn't lie down the street forever, or would find herself trying to explain to the police of non-magical people, why she was half naked, sleeping on the street, brain-dead to them, with — and OR — that was... Misunderstanding. And - this does nothing but harass innocent people, and make charges for you to face them, making me - the bad girl like the roads - only see what they want to see - not the truth - or the way of the law - but their minds made up of faint minds of the time, stupid that cannot even mumble, your name, they, ask the stupid question of why?

Like why she was in the dead of night with a box full of spell books, and all her stuff made them think she was a running away, a broken pillow... Garbage as well.

They give her a series of charges, which she will have to face ... And she pulled her house dangling, because she was drunk, as they thought. Then it was - the next morning and she woke up, she was in her bed as if nothing had happened. Naddalin opened the trunk again and pushed the fillings aside, looking for she—inconspicuous negligence—had been confiscated, she thought but before she could find her, she suddenly straightened, looked around again, was on the floor of her new upper bedroom, and Darry's looking at her from the intersection as if she had lost her.

A funny itch on her back, and the ass that she was skating inappropriately to a lady made Naddalin feel that she - she was watching - as if she were a celebrity - by all of them, but the street seemed deserted - and her house was hers with the girl who took her under her wings - and about that too - she thought ... What if they fall, and they will never bring them back. And no lights popped out the houses, but she felt those eyes on her—as if the girl from the story—had been chosen, and she was tricked into surrendering.

She leaned over the torso again, and her underwear crossed the room pulling out all the cute things - which didn't seem important to her now, but she stood almost immediately again, her hands clenched on the crystal ball, which Dariez had discovered, days before she said, this is not a toy, she said: "I know I can see a girl like you inside her..."

Naddalin - "Oh I know that girl very well, and you are good one day, but in time - in time."

She felt it instead of hearing it, she was like a thunderbolt that jumped from her hand to the ball as she touched it bringing her back the high voltage of energy to live: she ran outside, her hand and arm sewn with the ball in her palm to the sky above in cold shades of gray, and the thread of the storm above moved, with mood clouds, quickly, the stain of life hit her, knocked her on the ground, and she seemed fried, to Dares who ran to her and soon after , this crystal ball ounce belongs to them ... She muttered, she - she was ... And so she was the most evil of them all at that time. "So dark and so strong, it's..." I whispered to her... Because it was more than good to live, with a barking life now given to her.

And at once someone or something was standing in the narrow gap between the garage and falling from the fence behind it, one of them had to be a chase of the past, knowing that it should be - but which one?

Nadalin stared at the black corridor that was blocked by all the trees.

If she only knew if this shade was a girl, or if it would move like a girl figure, it would move, she would know what it was, or if it was something like a stray cat or - something else, it was also completely harmless.

Then Nadalin muttered - saying take her to hold her and never let her go, and then a light appeared inside the ball that grew brighter and brighter until it glowed, like a light bulb, almost dazzling Dariez, her face and eyes were closed and fixed on it with the phenomenon, she became the next in the line of the strongest - those who fell. She lifted her high above her head - now with both hands as no rain poured on her, suddenly she shone. With – with Orange Hora, as she stood in front of the garage door sparkling with

her newfound power to do anything, Naddalin said – "Know very well that you are a simple person just to get angry... You no longer feel as if you - as if you were in the ass - back Phil - thought.

Then between them, Nadalin saw, quite clearly, the small outlines of something too, with shiny eyes. Fear was with her now more than ever - I think he was one of them, no maybe they discovered her and did not walk straight.

Nadalin stepped back, saying that they would be after you ... However, don't let that stop you, learn as much as you can and see as much as you can, I'm looking for you, now they are after me, don't ask why, find out the way yourself.

Darry's- she started crying and said-

"Okay."

Part: 26

With the screams, I rolled back and forth on the sidewalk, in time. Nadalin was lying there doing it. Her legs passed a week and Dariez hit the torso and fell on it, it was as if she was dying ... You might think she put the glass ball down, rolling out of her hands. Then she threw her arms to hold her ... She never broke her fall like she did, she hit the ground hard for her, and she landed hard at rock bottom thinking she was going to die! There was a deafening sound explosion, made after the delay of her body attachment, and Naddalin threw her hands to protect the eyes from a sudden blinding light ... of the crystal ball. The shadow of her quest for the ball to regain life, even if that life was one of us, I knew I could feel it.

They went, as Nadalin saw them - rising above her and snatching her, like a hunt, sucking life out of her mind through her head. They were pulling strength from her, she was trembling as she died, as far as they could get.

The blue double-decker CAM tram bus was driving hard as it passed... which appeared out of thin air, so she seemed to rush down the aisle as if tearing apart and pulling dark shady trees. Gold letters above the windshield spell The - Knight Bus, to the station, the only way Nadalin can be saved is if they bring her back to school, to regain her strength, it was called the moment of her injury, they knew and saw this happen, even though her mind is body and soul. For a split second, Naddalin wondered if she had been ridiculous for falling, while being transported to the blue bus, she was gossiping, about meaningless things, things happening in that girl's life and story, details that she should not understand.

Then at the incense burner train station, the steam train rushed so close to use that you could feel the heat of the steam, and the conductor dressed in black jumped up and began to speak loudly into the night, saying don't waste time. Of course, Dariez was a little behind ... Strangely enough, it was number 13, he was taking it up to Fastback... To hear that it could be fixed, they were hopeful.

-And-

Welcome to the knight train, 13 back to your home away from home, emergency transport, for you they said this was life or death, so we will move, the track is bumpy, for the girl or the fallen magician maroon, just get your hands out, and get on the ship Miss said, he said to Dariez who was very worried, and she did and the train started to take off before her foot was in the footsteps of a wagon The train, and we can take you anywhere, with this line, you want to go, and that's when Dariez said "I know - I'm the one who owns this train." "You - just like a child." I just squinted... Not mean, but not in the mood ...

"yes, okay then... My name is Stan Choenpikes, and I will be your leader, so that the duration he said would be an honor for me... Miss!

Part: 27

Then the conductor stopped abruptly - he had just seen Nadalin, who was still sitting on her ground ... From the train car. Naddalin grabbed the ball, which was rolling on the rocking floor back and forth, until the EMT told her not to do it again, desperately tried to scramble on the feet, falling over and over again. Up close, she saw that Stan was only a few years older than her, nineteen, eighteen or at most, a big boy but very cute in all the right places, even if he had a few pimples, a dirty look, no boy had everything you had to look and find what lay inside. What are you doing there, what is this thing?

Stan said, abandoning the professional style, stunned by his curiosity... Ask questions, like a 5-year-old boy with a new toy vision.

Nadalin is down more than 4 times now ... Then she rolled on her stomach, now on the floor, on a stretcher, in order for them to carry out her vitality, and begin intravenous injections. Along with Stan Sniff, who began to feel feelings for Darry's to feel as he was.

"And I didn't do it on purpose," she said—they said, "We know," and then Naddalin said, annoyed that they felt about her as a somehow modest girl, with a guy she didn't know or feel comfortable with. One of Darry's knees and butt parts was torn in her jeans, showing her some tight underwear, and Darry's knew Stan was everything in her, by his cursory glances. However, strangely enough, it made her feel more loved than

ever, at a time of pain. Besides her hands - which she threw to break the fall was bleeding from her, and she needed to sew it if there was anything left to sew, there was raw skin hanging from the bone.

She suddenly remembered why she had fallen and quickly turned around to stare at the path between the garage and the fence leading to the trail that was surrounded by trees. The headlights of the Knight train flooded the ground in front of her with light, and she knew what one of them, girls from the past, saw after her, and yet she was, and she was empty—was everything in her mind on reading a story—or was it real, were they chasing her now? She felt as if this catch was in her mind now...

Dariez could feel looking at him with big sad eyes, and he was working. They were also dropping each other quickly, even if it was the first time, they would meet. "Stan said, he was looking at the magic, in the light of that it also happens, it was as if she forgot everything about Emma, who would feel cheated at that moment, however, after all, he was a boy, with everything the boys came up with, you know - boy things, girls find nice.

Part: 28

Besides, there was a big black thing, which she saw hovering over her, she thought of Nadalin, noting the uncertainty in her gap. In addition, like an unidentified mischievous black being... It should have been AVA, she was the only one to do it hiding in the background staring with mischievous intentions, I thought deeper about the creep of everything!

She looked around at Stan, wondering if he could also be trusted or not, she even said it out loud and then muttered that trust is only achieved when there is a gold ribbon around your finger, she said to Dariez, who seemed fond of her new interest. Who had his mouth slightly open, still looked at her with the eyes of a love wand. With a feeling of unease, Naddalin saw Stan's eyes move to identify Nadalin's head.

'... And like what's that on your head? Questions committed to knowing all the details. He said it all - all he spoke succinctly, with wet and thinking behind him. Naddalin said quickly, pulling her hair over her marks. If she - the magic office is looking for her, that's fine, but this was much more - the evil that she knew was one of them. She - didn't want to make it so easy for them, either way.

"Besides your name, little girl, what was your name?" Stan continued, never-never-never-never — never like wanting to forget her or forget her, incredibly unique he thought she was like her. See here comes Neville saying about the first name that came in her head, the sounds that she is, she thought she lost it and some still believe

she did, even if she was nothing more than a little girl herself. And so - so the train went on quickly, hoping to distract Stan, she was talking to her about the sounds in her head, and did you say she goes anywhere - or they take you somewhere because you're not you but all around you think it's still you - do you have the slightest idea what I'm telling you, or is it just gossip or mind appropriation of everything that makes you?

"Yes - yes," Stan said importantly... "Besides, anywhere you want - I'll pick you up and kiss you if you say you want to, you might move fast, as long as it's on the ground, and I have the money to do it, I'll do anything Miss Aye says." "I can't do underwater, and the fear of drowning said, along with being eaten by sharks, like that girl - 'I've seen it too.'" What about me and you, go to the next car", "Okay," she said rubbing her body into his, like a little girl in love would ... Much love... And they held their hands as if they had been lovers for years, and I am sad, "Go and be young and crazy, there is no harm in that."

"Only the united pulse of sex and heart together can create euphoria, and that's what it was for the first time with a boy. When she closed her eyes, she felt that he had many hands running down her body, which she touched everywhere, and many mouths, which passed so quickly over her, did not want to think that it would end the perfect moment, and with a hot man who loves perception, his teeth began to go under the surface to their fleshier parts, he was deep in their lower parts on them and that was absolutely true.

Now both naked, looking at each other there was nothing strange, just felt comfortable, put his full length on her. I enjoyed his weight on her, and enjoyed crushing it under his body. She wanted it to be welded to her, from mouth to feet.

The shivers passed through her body as she slipped every 7 inches between her little line that broke off in a narrow hole to fit her perfectly, as they did in making love for the first time, for the first time not for him, he knew what he was doing.

She even stopped thinking about Emma too, she was living the moment when the right person at the right time, the right person for the first time she thought, does.

"I don't accept and! Um- who cares about the kiss and tells ... Dares believes.

However, this is the same thing - these days.

"So, yes, I do - I do - that's exactly, like a teenage girl - I'm !!!."

Naddalin - I used to look suspicious again, thinking about all the tricks that have been done in the past to cute girls like her, and yet I think this is her life and stupid little years ... I had no opinion.

Neville - she said, they shot us down, didn't she - she said thinking something as if she knew... You have no you, you have the crystal that belongs to them no yah - but, oh yes, I know who you are...

Naddalin- Sh-h," she said, holding it with her index finger on her lips, because she is now sitting on one of the benches.

Move your hair away, on your head I want to see the mark, (show it) it's - you - you're here, right? The girl who was around, was beaten by possessing their power, which they had before. Your hands are fried even on top of them, but you have another 100 years, right, or something like that, in other words, eternal life? Is that right...?

... She wonders...

"Yes," Nadalin quickly said - "but you shouldn't know about this, unless... Unless you're like, one of them.

"Oh, I know - I'm not one of them..."

Part: 29

I'm glad to see that your discovery, Darry's Stan said, is coming back to the same train car, with the look of what we're just doing on their faces, and yet it was all supposed to be, so I was happy for them, it was time to craft, and we were about to be there. All color is pushed in a tunneled way in our eyes and sight. The fear in my mind was that all this was planned as it was with Christine, why he was so hot and lustful for her, and she herself, unless she was, and he and I are also completely fascinated by something or someone, and why she was too wet for him again, and I thought, it's not true - and then I was like don't say anything, you have to think about you - and just you. Darry's even said that there is nothing romantic, even if it is like a one-time thing ... That will always remain silent! The girl has a lot of those moments in her little life. I see you walked away with a gift too, I can see you grow tell. Nadalin said, there is one hanging from her skirt.

"Obi-forgot to take that out and her face turns bright red."

It's a real Tushy-toys Fox Tail Butt Plug, I liked the gray and white, well, better look at the butt hole, right?

Dariez said, and "It's nice!" she said after that line, and "I love it! We sell it in the gift shop so-o, yes, I said to keep one... I'll give it the store if I can... "Don't forget me..." Say... She shakes her ass side by side making it like pay for her sensual movements, saying "never-never" it was a lingerie trade, a little thing – something that reminds me of it. I know that every time he looks, touches and blows, he will have to change his clothes.

"I plan to keep her indoors, walk around all day with her, like what are they going to do?"

"It's nothing, it's your body, girl."

"If you think it's okay, do it - a fashion fox will start hanging from the miniskirt."

um - something to go with your gray fox earbuds, you've got there, I said.

"I told him how much, I love foxes. And how much I love them..."

And he said, "I have the thing for you, to go with them..."

"This is just made for a fifteen-year-old girl," he said guessing her age." "Then, to brush all things out, she laughs saying, your relative, and the girl never says."

-And-

Part: 30

Naddalin again searched in the trunk of the car, saying here, I have a book for you about foxes, she extracted some bags of money saying have fun in the store with him, keep it. And Darry's runs from jumping playfully, and then pushes some gold into Stan's hands, pulling him back by twisting her finger into his belt guard, saying - "Don't fool me or fool her, or break her heart, you'll see hell, you don't want to push it - understand, yes? Say - yes ...!"

... And he did.

Naddalin - "Remember boy - she remembers, and she also remembers - sucking!"

-Then-

Although Naddalin is about health, she always cares about her wonder mind, what just happened, and she thought deeply, finding out if this boy was with an average of 5- other girls, he probably slept with 31 partners, judging by the exposure scheme, and she is nothing.

I thought about the 7 that Carly said when she was 17 years old, she meant that she had been exposed to 127, odds of disclosure. Then Jenny is more than 12 in a year, equal to 4,095 acquaintances who had sexual activities with that person to someone and passed it on to you and to them. When you have sex with some remember that you have sex with everyone who was with him before you, the same with her.

-Any of-

At the top of the torso, the cage of the baby crow was balancing the edge at the top, on the platform on the train car hanging in the back outside, seeing the mysterious world passing on its side of ashes, puzzles, low fog, steam wiping around her body, she was still too a week to move. However, she wanted to make sure she was alive and not fried, like last night's dinner.

Moving on to new parts of the train, even Naddalin had not yet seen her, a car she added, to her line, there were no seats. Instead, half a dozen copper beds stood next to the curtain windows, and then it was said that the journey would take another day because of something unexplained, dark forces, which were interfering with the line, I knew, now how it was at the bottom of everything, I see they were sleeping tonight here... Night lights were on in brackets next to each bed, very strange, illuminating the wood-panelled walls of 1919 Pullman noisy cars.

A little magician in a night hat on each headboard, with the name Naddalin on each, for gest's sake, muttered, this is more beautiful than I had ever wished, I love the way you turn it all out. As she looked at her hands wrapped in the wound faucet, a worker said, "Can I get you anything?"

"No, thanks, I'll roll over and fall asleep," she said. Before she went under her new bedspread at night, or what seemed like a night, she pushed her trunk under her bed... With all the things she crushed, hoping not to disturb her, by any wandering hands that were not hers. Dariez was sitting in front of her - in a rocking chair, summarizing her long day. Neville, she is in the other next door to the other trapped by her.

There was another huge explosion, and the next moment Naddalin found herself flat on the bed, quickly thrown back by the knight's train that is now pulling the worlds, advancing forward to the other side. Reading Nefe's book about her life with thick glasses, she nodded to Naddalin, who nervously flattened that she was knocking again, reading about a girl she might see right in front of her but never see. As she sat on her bed on the edge, she just woke up from a nightmarish shock. Stan, sitting in her chair next to her now from his shift, still has magic happening.

Nadalin pulled herself, stared out of the dark window with a sudden explosion of energy, saw all things there distorted and looked from another world, and then saw looking at completely different windows, the city - looks like something you see in an attractive village located in France in 1920 which locals call - Town for a short name, However, with any land, there are many cities within the city, which make a charming world, a street with its people, And shopping, you can even start seeing the numbers on street signs, which were appearing even as we passed with the naked eye - now, slowing

down to normal speed, hinting the castle away, all we need to do is cross the bridge over the gorge, however, we are there made to the other side.

Stan was watching Naddalin's stunned face with great pleasure, saying "this is normal", for old trains that momentarily feel as if they are jumping on tracks, I looked the same way also the first time also when we entered again.

"Where are we...?"

Dariez kept repeating that she was trying to stop me, and that she was scared.

"What is this place...?"

"We're sweating there, it worked... You see things that most girls your age never see, because those places have been forgotten, with your new education."

-And-

"Ah, nothing changes here, but it seems intimate," Ernie said.

"Like — how — non-magical people don't cut this train?" Ernie said.

"I bought it, I don't want it to die in a field, for a moment like this, only us, who demand it - a silent road for us only," Dares said.

~*~

"Look at them all so nice! They have all lived a life like yours, which is why they are here, so you can get to know them and your life. Stan said disdainfully. "Well, well, he's a beginner, this one!"

Unlike a house where they don't listen properly, right?

"You don't look good either. I've never noticed this much before why now maybe I fell in love with a gentleman, and you see the difference now, it's separate worlds. Naddalin told Dariez.

"They—they don't...?"

Naddalin - So ladies, now it's better to wake up more, not look curly, need a bath and give birth badly, get dressed and eat cereal, in the food car, and then leave, Stan see you soon, "Oh" - said Ern.

Stain - and we will be in a minute to say a final goodbye as you leave, and he taps softly and very gently on his nose saying - "I love you!"

-And-

Stan walked by Naddalin's bed for what would be the last time of this trip and disappeared into a narrow wooden corridor. Naddalin was still staring out the window, sitting in her stately bed, increasingly nervous. It seemed that Ernie did not grasp the idea of what was left to wake up to, she was still sitting in her chair.

The knight's train continued to climb on the line of the Rails Mountains, climbing very carefully to the bridge, but did not hit anything, screamed and squeaked. Marker lines for the whistle, changing 20-pound lanes—a rail-like drawing—that is, for the 8-mile side passage—using the strangely high flyover in the air, from other animals in the world, and people have moved away from the nibbling train that seems to weave its way through the brush and tall grass. Stan came down from the hall only to squeeze Dariez in a long, slow kiss pressing her body against his own, it was nothing more than a short, warm green bathrobe from the bath, as he took it by the hand and said, "Come here with me" and she did and the steam licked her body, as they bathed together emotionally.

"Last goodbye yes - okay!" despite Naddalin.

There you go," Stan happily said, stepping on a towel to remove it, and patting it with another large, fluffy towel.

He took care of her in a chamois, in his arms and then put her on her bed, helped her put on her uniform and put her feet in her shoes, he stood towards the front of the car where she said "she wanted to sleep all night, in this - a bed, he seemed to say last night - I can give you sweet dreams, as she rolled with a teddy bear and mint on a very distinctive pillow.

Darry's – She pressed a handkerchief over her eyes and then her mouth and staggered down 2 steps. Stan threw away her bag, along with ours, after it had been away from the doors shortly before they needed to be closed. There was another loud explosion, there was thunder in a narrow passage of the track, another train was coming down the line next to us, the leaves of the trees hissing in their breeze, I even found jumping off the road, although I knew he wasn't close to me, but I felt like he was right next to me because my skirt was tight on my legs.

Naddalin couldn't sleep even if she wanted to With all the pain, she felt with her body that she was in it - and about the fact that she - and they, traveled on a train that did not continue to hit hard and jump a hundred miles at a time, but nevertheless, she loved all these experiences.

Looking at the electronic billboards showing videos revolving around the one thing that seemed like our era, everything else was still in 1920, these billboards were

telling the best stories of the best events in the small town in the small villages, where the return crept into the wonder of what would happen to him came to his mind.

(Return)

Stan had opened a copy of the daily newspaper, during his breakfast, shook it and handed it to me in a curly ball, but I said "thank you". Besides - he did not read it, but what the boy reads today is anything ... She thought quickly, she was sticking her tongue between her teeth, saying "great" this is cute - he is one of those smart boys.

A large picture of a depressed-faced man with long, tangled hair blinking Naddalin from the front page, all the texts and images move as if they were charming, Naddalin said that everything has life here. Besides saying "he - this guy looks strangely familiar to me."

"This guy there she pointed to as he tried to hide behind the bleeding yellow page that was torn and torn!" then Naddalin said, not remembering the issues for a moment.

"He was in the news at home too, as he wanted," "So he's now here?"

Stanley turned to the front page and laughed, saying "Well, he finally laughed, all that's left for him is the prize at the end of his series."

Naddalin - "Sounds like a girl, I once knew, I don't get a sense of humor from death sorry."

-And-

Trirus Black is the name - Dariez - he said, sleepy, leaving and scratching so-o-not like a lady. "Besides that of course," as it was in the news, Neville. Where have you been, she looked like she was crawling out of bed? She... He laughed out classily at the blank look on Naddalin's face, removed the front page and handed it to him.

"You want us to teach him," Naddalin said in a choked voice. Now you understand what Firenze's warning means. Attempts do not succeed, to scare her, it is better not to hear her, being very small, sometimes neglected in her life.

Of course other creatures that lived in the forest would have heard Dargids' failed attempts to teach English, do you hear how this child speaks, Naddalin told Dares he thought he was sweet and kind but not for his age.

Neville - "She said, - an ant!"

"You have space to take girl insults."

"Yes, but I have been trying all my life to fix this", you do not care about showing the farm girls what you are doing, there is nothing wrong with that except God, other girls will blame you for it. '

"yes, even if you talk to her a little bit to 'yah' both of you to see, about that, maybe you can all see her, about what you're up to do." (Say it in a mountain accent.) Nadalin said I hope you see him.

"Because - I think, if she - can speak that way, which undermines well, you for how smart you are - beautiful and smart, I have been there - honey." Nadalin looked at Emma, who looked at her from between her toes, trying not to laugh, looking at her. More about the truth of the truth, try to be nice to her.

"It makes you wish we could find light, right?" she said, and she was - so shaken, like - Yah - don't laugh.

"We're going to do it then?" said Dargid, who apparently didn't understand what Nadalin had just said, as she walked with them at the station.

"Okay..." Nadalin said, already obliged to promise to make Dariez a beautiful young woman at school.

"We'll try, as you do — it already has a good reputation," Dargid said.

Back home, the day the sun entered was a total eclipse of the sun, blocking all daylight for the first time in 99 years around 12:15 p.m. in our regions, which made headlines. More than anything else - and scared the world of admiring the darkness, I now looked there and thought, I will never see this again, but I wonder if my story is okay.

"I knew I could count on you, Naddalin, to remember to have a video of that event," Dargid said, cheerful in a very watery way, saying that I am getting old, and this reminds me when I said that to my father the first time, I was not more than 5 years old, I remember, she covered her face with her hand again with a handkerchief.

Dariez - "I will get up and come forward."

"How was that?"

"Not good, you think I'm stupid... I can tell."

"Ah, I don't know if I want you to stand there, like..." Neville said.

I know you have exams... If you can sit there in your non-discrimination robe, where you seem invisible by anything around you, here is everything we need to know

once a week and have a small conversation with them, after knowing everything we need to know.

"There's no way to get through his class!" said Dariez.

~*~

(Forward Week)

"What not!" said Emma, wondering if... If you're in trouble because of it.

"Dargid, never—never-no, don't wake her up, we don't need to do that just to pass on those notes if we work hard and accept."

(Return to walk to the castle)

However, Dargid had already climbed over the big tree trunk, the path that fell, a week or two ago, you would have thought by now that someone would have cleaned this thing, but no! In any case, in front of them were more children who were also climbing towards the castle, whom they called home for about six months.

Naddalin - when she was - about ten feet away, she rose above the record, working on her ability to rise on her journey, still feeling the collapse, touching the ground, and smiled softly on her shoulder to Emma and the other girls were saying - "Look, she doesn't do better than us now," and in the middle of her back you can now see all the cuts and lacerations in her skin, over the course of her dramatic process, the night before, she was not even able to walk At night, will you try to fly right now? Is she crazy...? The one who looked shocked said... She will even think of such a thing to do in such a situation on the weekend.

Then she let out a giant roar from her mouth as if overtaken by an evil force, which I called to hear screaming all around her - a silent forest. The birds in the treetops flew actively as they chirped from their perch and flew away, as if frightened, even the house on their hill, above their heads, flew away, right in front of Nadalin and Emma, meanwhile, as they walked the trail.

The sound is as if the flying fon rose from the ground in her overwhelming scream, and her eyes are a deeper shade of black - they could be as she cried blood from them.

Nadalin trembled when Dariez put his little hands on them to hold her, her knees knocking and her body shaking, something you'll see in exorcism. She turned her head to see who was looking at them and what bothered her so much, and the knowledge was still

there, she was lifted from her feet and thrown into the air as if someone was holding her from behind.

'... Are you okay, Miss—that is, drunk—with what was going on in her mind, and then he hit her, she came back and terrified her? There and then says Dargid, in a voice that can disturb her, stepping back with the long branch lifted, feeling her feet firmly and then her knees, ready for something or something to do with her and again - like a toy playing with."

Hey, you hit her so hard that she kicked her out?

Nadalin and Emma retreated as much as possible while keeping - the evil smells of anything far away, in their sight, but this is the thing that they could not see the evil attack from inside her mind, but she knew how and why, well - he was one of them, ... It was she - and Nadalin knew. Between two trees she had not yet uprooted, as she walked the weekend along the long road that runs through the land of grasses and trees with curly branches.

They looked at his terribly huge face - now rising above Nadalin's, even though his skin, which looked like an evil-looking lion, horns, he seemed to want to stop himself from it and eat me, suddenly the light of the world went out on the day of the eclipse and there was a full black moon swimming, in a bloody red sky, insects crawling out of their mouth, where they were again thrown into the air, into the dark. - From the day she said I couldn't stand it anymore, where I was attacked in my body, mind and spirit, they found me and attacked me again.

Like - only when I'm out forever, they suck me back... Her ability to try to end the madness creates a wave of energy in a column to the atmosphere of the world above her, a swollen hurricane, above her like a picture pictured in the girl's story years ago, then she knew Dariez, she knew she was the story girl, but she never I will never admit whether she was or not - even after Darry's, being 99.9 present, sure of the truth. However, there was always - that 0.1% silenced her.

In the crystal ball was the soul of the girl, whom we know as Naffa, which is why I could see her, and she was looking at me. It was a clearing, it goes back to the glass, but I say what I need to know, I became the next in hexagonal shape.

~*~

Nivea's body was the bullet, forever lost, the soul was inside Nadalin, but his mind was not hiss, they still had power over it, they even split into three.

A spirit that will now be shared with Dariez, it was as if her features had been carved and this evil thing was the alternative, it was the parent entity - a tower that would not fall completely.

~*~

Eh, the nose, wet and dripping with mucus covered with knotted hairs, was thick and resembling teeth, the mouth was uneven and full of deformed yellow fangs.

Ah yes - like - the size of half a baton brick follows the shape of the diamond logo, being an innocent sweet little week is not very smart so as not to be silly for a girl - named Darry's - that's me.

The little eyes - but staring through me as if they took me to a new place of fear - I had never been before - completely overfocused, physically and dead character. It was a greenish-muddy structure, covered with hairs. And I wondered why-? Why - she didn't have friends, family and everything normal for a teenager - so I thought about it and mumbled in my mind, with this entity inside her how she could, and in her mind she heard me say that - at that exact moment - I know she was - Nevaeh.

And you are next!

"G-Thank you!"

Darry's – Then I was lifted from my dirty ankle and turned the back over my head and then like a ball and in my mind I started hearing the same sounds I've had for years now. Say - "You help him go crazy - well be sure!"

I must have rubbed my eyes hard, at that very moment, without warning, I got up with amazing speed and vitality. I defeated him... How come I have no idea?

"Oh my god - I don't feel shame anymore!"

However, everything is over, and will I get over it?

Naddalin heard Emma screaming, she could see chasing her naked eyes in an attempt to suck life out of her, terrified, next to her, Darry's stood up and grabbed her hand to hold her.

The trees that were next to them to support the rope bridge, and they were about to cross the valley - began to jump violently as they stood on it, as if someone was laughing with all their might, however, and I felt like someone had made me by my wrist and ankles tied in an ominous way, trying to drag me down 1,000 feet (about the height of the Empire State Building) or up to the water depth below the ditch - protected by a very dark girl from the bitter topless mermaids Other - wonderful in his own way - black

and gray tones - with the skills of fallen angels - who were snatched from the air - objectively - like killer whales - in the waters of the dead past - a haunted shipwreck hangs in the fog pointing to the side - many ventured out to see - did not come out alive, mermaids with a net of fire around their soft skin - drifting in clear water, which would tear a girl like me - for blood.

They made it their home, at the end of the island - in the center - with its abandoned lighthouse, inside the ship.

She was as scared as possible. Dargid, at least sixteen feet on the other side, said she had to fly to be safe.

Looking from place to place and more, Grawp reached out to the other side so that it would be as it did, holding a parachute that says hold it, I'll shoot you with it or if you fall to use it to slow your fall. She fell like a bird from her nest from the upper branches of a towering pine.

She even shook in her proper place with a growl, or a clear cry of resentment, knowing that she would die if she did not learn to fly quickly ... Like birds - the first time I did it. Is; The wings spread out and feathers flew, and how they were now at the end of the water.

However, the earth seemed forever far away, and Darjid threw his arms over it, his head to protect himself from the income daughter, who was not sure of his journey forward.

"Anyway, Grawpy," Dargaid shouted, looking anxiously at another girl falling into the air from about 100 feet, for someone to come to make sure she landed. Safely, with magical powers and her raised hand, she landed perfectly on her feet.

"I brought some friends to meet some Yen, but it wasn't a start, I thought it would definitely happen to you!" she spoke.

"Do you remember when I said to Lynn — about all this — in class, 'I can't? This story wasn't a fairy tale - I know - I know that one of you - is! However, I know that you will never tell, because you do not trust anyone, not even we are here. However, we know that you should be careful, and we have limited this to both of you.

Remember, when I said "maybe I should take a little trip and walk away for a while, I did, that was it... to get them and make sure they and I had our house was not installed ... I'll look at her a little, and she winked?

"Do you remember Graubie? To take a look, see more. May God help him... However it was SH-HH too.

However, Grawp simply gave another low necrosis. It was hard to know when she was listening to Darjid or when – even familiar voices – Dargid was giving a speech.

I looked around a girl who was - just a spectator who felt their anger too, she was something small compared to other girls, anyway she was hanging over a pine tree, a toy in front of them, the children pulled the tree towards them, for the simple pleasure of seeing how far she would bounce when - she left her, she was thrown into the air, in the arms of another girl, she was also harassed to be the little one.

"Stop now before someone gets hurt, you look at me and I say - 'I don't know what I want to do,' but she was saying to other kids, don't do this - that's why you are all here you were like her at some point, right? Dargid shouted.

"It's not good to get together with others." Now cut down the tree one last time, the girl managed to get off with no more than a few black and blue marks.

And for sure, Nadalin managed to see the ground around the roots of the tree and begin to crack, lying behind the water's edge, feeling very strong, she has now lived her new life - again - another 100, still not sure if they have yet found her ... She feels like she's seen over 100 years of life – and she lives, so be it, but she only lived in 25 years in real time.

"I had a company for Lynn as you said!"

Dargid shouted - "Company, look - see Young women making friends playing - interacting - don't kill them - for God's sake, there are sweet and younger - looking for someone to "take care of them - Bennis!" Naddalin and girls - I brought you knew friends!

Oh, Dargid, Emma doesn't complain, but she didn't care that they were prepuberty kids in her mind who needed Benkys and babysitters, but Dargaid actually raised his hand to say it last, without saying a word we knew was silent.

Dargid stumbled over pine needles and blinked repeatedly in frustration, looking at her feet to walk weakly down the road - muttering something like - "M-M- her children these days - I remember - when I was a girl ... And the sound disappeared. With his index finger raised and trembling.

Dargid said the girl was thrilled when she left the top of the tree, which swayed with fear and drowned it, rushing to where Nadalin and Emma were standing, saying breathlessly that it was nice to introduce you both to the two. , his glasses fell off his face and cracked in one of the lenses.

"I'm Naddalin, Grawp's favorite or something, I asked shyly - "No kids, just old friends! Naddalin is a particularly important girl who should know well.

One of the girls said to the other group of girls, "Naddalin, this is one!" she - can become, visit everyone if you have to go far, do you understand? She does not feel healthy.

Nadalin realized that his bandage hands were patting all their shoulders saying "hello", and that Emma was there, saying - "Look girls, she's cute - don't be afraid."

They watched her, very anxiously, as she lowered her hands to them and could peek at her, but were amazed to see that they were almost the same. The same size as them.

"And she's Emma," you see, she's a close friend of Darry's – like close ones ...

She turned to Emma and said, "Would it be nice to tell them your story, Naddalin?"

"Don't go, like again - it's not easy to say ..."

"However, you're going to do well - I know you're okay..." He said- Naddalin. "It's just hard to remember all the names to remember, not the story - for me anyway. "

No, not at all, Emma screamed, I have everything in my mind handy.

"Isn't it" nice? Yes?

Look at what some teachers have said.

"Two Lynn friends must come to NO!" Graven's hands sped out of nowhere toward Emma, scratching the Dementors and pulling up and down — not all the way from the box locked in the air. Nadalin grabbed and retreated behind the tree with the girls, while trying to defeat them, she also knew to whom the spirits belonged, and they would not take no as an answer.

"Evil is an evil girl, Dargid screaming, while Emma clung to two waiters behind her - the tree - now, trembling and moaning - she knows she was behind her."

"Too bad girl!"

Nadalin pulled her head out from around the trunk of the big tree and saw Dargid lying on her back, she was dying, her hands above her eyes, she could see their faces, clear as daytime, but everything in her head, "they are brain dead," while she said - "Ali - " she cried, while his hand let go of her hand in her last moments.

The other staring around lost interest, revealed, to their amazement and admiration, got up and engaged in their activities again, as the body of an old friend began to decompose, pulling the pages of the day typewriter automatically spitting out the pages... Keys - Shelling and Hammers Clatter - Page after Page - Flying in the Air - Stadium, She could see who at the bottom of everything was the one who was fooling us all. , investigated the text, and they were always them!

"Okay," Emma said heavily, raising with one hand to pinch her nose bleeding and the other hand cut and dripping blood.

"Well... Their yen is ... I made a friend and lost him every day, welcome to my life," said Naddalin.

"You met her and now she will see you again in this life forever - her life is over - they took her ... All of them were ... They ...

"Yes... Eh well... This is life and it will grow." Emma says.

I looked at all those young faces, which were now cutting the pine - it was a child possessed by their hands!!!

Then, with an expression of detached pleasure, this girl looked at me with a very creepy devilish smile, golden eyes, her head polished to the side and she said - "I will kill you - for fun!" '

Standing on the rocky face of a great memorial statue of a wise ancient wizard from the past; who was stronger than ever before him, and now he is the one whose name will not bear it—that title, look—the tree began to uproot itself where it stood squeaking because it fell plucked from the world, from the soil, to decompose too—like it inside.

"Well, I think that's enough for a day," Emma said.

"We... We're going now, okay? Naddalin and Emma nodded, holding together and sad.

Emma's shoulders crossed her arms over them again, and Naddalin still pinches her nose, leading way back to the trees along the twilight path.

No one spoke for a moment, not even when they heard ... A distant crash, even with that means they've finally passed all... Pine trees were heading towards clearing.

Emma's face was pale as she had to sit on a bench for a while, only so her mind could filter. Naddalin couldn't think of one thing to say. What will happen when they all discover what was hidden in the Forbidden Forest?

Ginger, Emma, and the other girls then also promised that she would continue what seemed like useless attempts to attend attacks on them, but that she would win.

Monsters - never been wonderfully harmed - fools who they are, who should never have been - and do not mix with humans. They are demonic - in what I saw, demonic.

"Wait," Dares said suddenly, just as Nadalin and Emma were struggling through a thick collection of complex herbs behind her, not sticking to the path.

Nadalin and Emma raised their hands. Now that they stopped walking, they also heard a close movement, they drowned as if there were evil eyes on them.

"Oh, Joanna," Emma said softly, he was the one who came behind them, and stunned them.

... Where was it?

Nadalin had no confidence, that was all he thought of!

"I thought you were told never to do that," said a deep male voice, which a girl should never have, "that you are no longer welcome in our group, Emma said?" "You're scary... Even for us girls, you did it yourself.

"It wasn't nice," said another girl, standing there was new, but the look they were giving her all didn't doubt it anymore.

"We were nice to you, and you stabbed us in the back... Su ya, go to."

~*~

The girl's bare torso seemed for a moment to float towards the flight of a brown horse spotted with a half-bluish glowing light around her wings, and then they saw that her hair was smoothly attached to her body—by her as if they were tied mind, body, and soul. The horse had a proud posture, high cheekbones, a long face with long brown hair in layers.

The girl was armed. With arrows and a long bow hung on the shoulders, as required in school to protect us from evil. Our bodyguard. The trees behind her were stealing and another four or five centaurs were appearing behind her, as she began to fight for us.

In the aftermath of-

"How's yes, Lily?" Emma said cautiously, like the rest of the girls.

Nadalin immediately recognized the bodies of the girl, who met many moons many years ago that night. This happened, when she had to live and not die, and now on the same night of alignment. The Great Eclipse.

However, she did not give any indication that she had seen Naddalin before, but it seemed that she was hiding the fact that she had known her for years.

"So," she said, with a terrible nuance in her voice, before immediately turning to Lily.

"We agreed, I think, what are we going to do if they show their faces in the forest again?"

"I remember that I ... Man now, I... She fell and I have to live with her ... Lily says.

"You and I - we always like to be: 'we' will stop 'all' murders committed by them – and it is in particular."

"You shouldn't interfere with girls with them," says Lily. In addition to saying, "There are a lot of maniacs."

"Our customs are not yours, nor are our laws – things here are very different from where you all came from, in your small towns. These girls betrayed and insulted us, but there are higher than all of us, and we are always angry.

You don't know what's going on there, or as you know, everything will work out, Emma says impatiently, there they create problems, we hope they go there and when they're there, hopefully they stop. , and they are there for us to deal with the destruction.

"She did nothing but help Duerre... and others. This is speculation... But it is."

Firenze- said and I heard by chance.

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"Oh no, never say that," Nadalin said.

"Firenze has entered human bondage," said a gray centaur with a hard, deeply wrinkled face and ghostly character. "Slavery!" Said Nadalin said scathing about his bandages. "She pays us all a favor, that's it, for you, trust her."

"She promotes our narrative of our secrets among humans," Lily said softly, killing young girls to get into their minds and use their bodies to live inside, so that they have an immortal life. There can be no return to such a shame, and yet they are still there!

Wagging her shoulders, Emma said, "If you say that, but partially, I think you're making a big mistake.

"Like you, man, once upon a time—they were too and wanted to be in the worst way, to return to our forest when we advised you," Neville said.

"Now, yes, listen to me," Naddalin said angrily. You are new here, be nice to her, she knows more, and at this point she is the head of all things here, she was the one who had to live with their anger, you have one to tell her story is real and your life before was nothing compared to yours.

Lily said effortlessly: "It's no longer up to you, you have a mind that thinks for yourself.

Guards - "We will let you pass today because together with your teachers, they enter the castle for the first time. She looks completely surprised, wide eyes and mouth down.

'... They're not right, are they...? The girl interrupted the others with contempt.

"Students, Lily, from there... Haivanahul! Small town girls...

- Perhaps they have already benefited from the teachings of the traitor Firenze.

Lily said softly: "However, slaughtering foals is a terrible crime that we do not touch innocent people.

Today, Dargid, she passed, why do you think they wanted her to die forever? The effort it took was not worth it, as if they could not get away from this place, although the forces fell and were not as strong as before.

"You pay for the centaur friendship that would help the traitor Firenze escape us — and it's at the heart of everything."

"I will not be taken away from the forest, as they say in their minds that it was captured, where they went into a coma.

"Let's go, please let's go...!" said Naddalin Emma and then the girls in a high tone, as if the voice of a little girl from the past was trying out, a terrified voice, as the two girls were chased by this gray and black centaur who hits them and hits the ground right behind them like the ground chamber inside the castle wall, with her claw-like hands with long nails...

Lily moved forward, but the crossbow was still raised - there was really no need after it made her feel safe, the eyes were still menacingly fixed on her, the villain crawling on her, finally, they could see, Dargaid meets them again, saying - "Come on".

"Lily called after them, as the centaur slipped out of sight, and that might be good at the time and then not so much either.

Our tolerance is waning!

"We know they're hiding inside the forest, on the fact that it's haunted and too scary for most of us girls to get into!"

Dargid turned around and gave every semblance of a desire to walk straight to Lily. She will "tolerate" them as long as she exists if she was not able to before her.

"It's as much our forest as yours, retreat and leave us alone," the little girl shouted in a narrow-eyed pricing manner - from tense nervousness, because she was sucking them back, from the walls of the castle to the dark depths of the mysterious ominous forests!

"We just keep pulling back by them, even when we run, we can't escape."

She screamed, as both Nadalin and Emma pushed with all their might against Dargid's coat to keep her moving forward, being the eldest of them all.

Darry's - she still looks scared like all of them so far, she also keeps - she looked down. With the expression of fear did not change to a slight surprise when they both saw her pushed. It's almost over, but she doesn't cling to the knowledge that she's braver than them, pushing from behind the set. She didn't seem to have felt it, but she was showing her true colors of courage.

"Calm down, you two," she said, as she turned around for a walk, while panting after her — now as she ran in front of them with all her might.

"Dargid," said Emma breathlessly, avoiding the nettle patch they passed on their way there, "If the centaur doesn't want half humans, like the half-blood of this girl, who are here to turn into this world in the woods, they feel they have a place to control it and take it well.

Lily - "Like - it doesn't look as if Naddalin ... They want the girls who want you!!

"And I'll be able to end this," I heard what they said, Dares said lightly, "They won't hurt the pony—the kids—I mean, will they?"

Nadalín - "yes, yes - they should have seen what they did with the children in the orphanage on the ground, years ago, like Christine, she has pages, about everything, it's horrible."

Darry's - "Anyway, we can't allow ourselves to be pushed, that's what they want... They want you - to do it ... Fight them, then you are wrong, you leave him, and you are also wrong - what to do?"

"Nice try," Nadalín muttered to Emma, who looked apprehensive.

Finally, they returned to the track, and after another ten minutes, the trees began to thin again. They were able to see patches of clear blue sky again, and in the distance, specific sounds of cheering and screaming.

"Was that an extra goal?" asked Emma, parked in the tree-covering shelter when the Klebciara Stadium appeared.

"Like – yes I think the games are over?"

"I don't know," Emma said miserably.

Nadalín felt that she looked much worse to wear. Her hair was full of twigs and leaves, her costume was now completely torn in several places and there were many scratches on her face and arms as well.

Nadalín knew she should have looked a little better than the night before but that wasn't. However, she would have overseen the games.

-And-

You should read the papers more, Neville, she has all these games and events listed on her.

Part: 31

-And-

Nadalín grabbed the paper to the light of the lantern and read: Black still on the loss Trirus Black, the most honorable person ever held in the castle of Dizeryland, still eluding his capture, the office of magic now firmly established, as you see it's life with the pages.

Besides, we're doing our best to get back the lions are said to see our panic on our faces as we read and watch, he said "Martita of Magic, Cornelius Harlan, morning, and beg the magical community to stay calm, just like you girls don't worry about anything."

-And-

Harlan was criticized by some members of the International Federation of Jugglers for informing non-magical people Prime Minister Marteta of the crisis.

"Well, really, I shouldn't have known," Harlan said irritable.

"Black is energetic, angry, angry and crazy."

"There is a danger to anyone who crosses that person or the magical or earthly world."

"I have – Prime Minister Martita's assurance, that she – she will not breathe – a word of Black's identity to anyone. Moreover, let's face it - who would trust her if she did?

-And-

Although non-magical peoples or "first people" have been told that lions carry a gun, (a metal stick, which non-magical peoples use to kill each other called a dagger...)

The magical community lives in fear of a massacre, like the one that occurred a year ago and the day before when Black killed one hundred and thirteen people with one curse. On day 24, in the 12th month, 366 days (about 1 year) or so, the splashing bloodbath will represent for fame. The cultivated was also high, I remember ... All these children, think about moms and dads and how the next day they feel their absence.

Nadalin looked at the shaded eyes of Trirus Black.

Dariez - the only part that appears now, and in the frame of the picture - the sunken face and the head of the children he killed, to make love after they are no longer fighting - like this is what he will do to them, look - see all this in the background of those separate floating parts of the body that sway green, which did not survive - ah - arrows- F.

She says — he keeps all parts of their bodies — in glass jars on his desk, next to his old typewriter that resembles his manuscript, which we will never reveal or be published. He said - here it makes patients crooked, scares me - stories of the desire to make creepy love for children ...

Naddalin - "She says that he is having intercourse with the dead!" Besides saying at the same time - "Do we really put all the nuts in the same category - he eats crayons, rolls his entrails into balls, and then too."

Blink - Flash - Blink ... is what Dariez did...

"You think he's too—from him, and he may not be—you don't believe, everything you read about someone who may have had a preparation."

Emma said: "Fa, you believe in what you want... I think that's the case."

Duriez - "As if I was never comfortable, I was angry at everyone's stupidity."

"I feel you..." Nadalin said, at that moment, that day, and in that warm time. They were tied up because it was her child that she never had children.

Hearing girls talking at a group gathering not far ...

"There was one who seemed alive, keeping her whole body raised for the "until she did - passed - to our side, but with him above her, an earthly body."

Naddalin never met the ashes angels, but today she met the girl Anna - Emma.

Emma - "I was almost the one who also survived."

However... She saw pictures of them in her defense thinking about it at that moment – against dark and black art classes.

However, the girl who now shows her other side to her was and continues to change before her eyes, with her waxy white skin, looks like an angel she has never seen before.

The wings will have a cover of ash, falling to the ground, like the remnants of paper - still burning and part of the light with flame, in shades of gray, falling like a unique snowfall, along with the body that will burn ... So then a new life begins—in it some incense, before your eyes, crying in sorrow extinguishing her burning dread and her passion to recover what she had lost, for her former life.

Interval: 3

Ego

Emma-

(Back)

The shadow - which appears through - from the inside and then recedes.
"Stamina is everything, that is, energy and strength."

"I've got stamina – don't give up, I won't give up – I've got stamina!"

Damen's dark eyes focus on my eyes all the time whether I want my privacy or not, they see in me and go out and look into my eyes reflecting that they see it inside me, it annoys me to listen to it, I really listen to it all the time, like it I now have this too.

I press my lips together and nod my head, her voice hits the effect of my head: I tell you all that I'm not crazy, I hear sounds too! She was never crazy, and she brought us closer than ever.

I-Emma-think-tell them all what they can't understand, they took me, like her with their hexagon!

Stop procrastinating, I thought after they had my mind and got over it!

However, I do not, I will not say a word, nothing but the feeling of shock that passes through me - of all those before me - I feel all their feelings. I just delay it to endure it, I can delay, even more, tearing up sounds through me.

Raising your hand, she nodded, palmed, and moved towards my hand, feeling the sparks of attachment to memories and transferring them to one girl to another.

I raised my arms hurriedly, and carefully, and figured out to avoid any physical contact when you say, "Now tell me, what do you think?"

I close my eyes, not sure what Naddalin is trying to do with me to do it, then I ignore them and say: "Well, I see pale skin, long fingers, freckles or two, nails in desperate need of a manicure..."

"Really, but think now, that sounds right."

It radiates, as if I had just passed the easiest test in the world.

However, if you can see it as it is, you won't see it at all, there are many - and yet you can see - and that's more than most. Instead, you'll see a range of parts that include neutrons, protons, quarks, and electrons.

And inside those small quarks, right down to the smallest idea, you'll see pure vibrational energy moving at a speed slow enough, so that it looks solid and solid, however, so abundant so quickly, that it can't be seen for what it is.

I'm not sure - incredibly, I'm narrowing my eyes. Not to mention the circumstances in which these things have been taught for hundreds of years.

"Trust". She told me excitedly.

"Seriously, ever - no distinct entity."

I've moved completely to the topic, leaning towards me.

"It's all the same. Items that give the impression of density, like you and I, and this sand we sit on, are just a mass of energy that gradually shakes enough to look solid, while things like spirits and ghosts vibrate so quickly, they are almost unbearable for most humans to see – and yet we can see them.

"I see you," I say, eager to remind her all along, I was spending it with my ghostly sister.

"Or at least I got used to it, you know before it interferes with the bridge and moves — like all the others."

"I met her, I think."

"Also, that's precisely why - you can't see you anymore," she nodded. I want you to be with a girl named Dares, be friends with her, she's like me in many ways she'll love her – I can see that too – for you.

"Her vibration moves very violently. Although some can see beyond it all.

I look at the water in front of us, and the waves roll under the bridge he was standing on, one by one. Endless, never-ending, immortal like us.

"Now raise your hand again and bring it so close to mine that we almost touch it."